



CFC NEWS

Saving Living Space for Living Things

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CFC's floating islands star in Science Channel TV segment on 'green' answers for planet

by Tom Vanderpoel

On December 3, and for the second time this year, national television featured CFC and its properties. This time our floating islands were a subject of discussion on the Science Channel. A Toronto group with a series on the Science Channel decided to make a green tour of the U. S. They were looking for science innovations that could help our planet. When told by Floating Island International, the creator of the product, that CFC was going to launch several more islands, they called and asked if they could film the event. We said yes!

Floating islands help filter pollutants from our detention pond. They accomplish this when the native plants installed on the islands send roots through the island base and into the water. The roots absorb pollutants and sequester them in the plants' foliage. Bacteria develop in the plants' root mass, and these bacteria then consume even more of the pollutants. Together they devour almost ten times more of the contaminants in a given area than do shoreline plants. Not only are we creating great wildlife habitat, but we are improving water quality for our downstream neighbors.

In August, the film crew came to Flint Creek Savanna, and on a rainy day they filmed for 5 1/2 hours. Our property looked like a green oasis, and the floating islands were successfully launched.



- Tom Vanderpoel (left) with Science Channel crew.
Photo by John Schweizer

When we began this project, we never guessed that we would get such great publicity from the islands. This cutting-edge technology we have brought to our community is another example of CFC's creating living space for living things.

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Floating islands installation demonstrates enhancements to water quality, wildlife habitat

by Tom Crosh

I was so intrigued by the floating island installation at Flint Creek Savanna that I decided I had to know more about what these manmade bio-havens can do. On October 12 & 13, I attended the first bio-haven wildlife seminar at Floating Island International headquarters in Shepherd, Montana. The property has a series of man-made ponds fed by water from Bear Paw Creek. Each pond covers several acres and is packed with bio-havens that amazingly cleanse the water which eventually is discharged into the Yellowstone River.



*Tom Crosh (left) with Frank Stewart, P.E., Consulting Engineer and Bruce Kania, CEO, Floating Island International.
Photo courtesy of Floating Island International.*

If you have ever been to Montana, you know that this is cattle country and guess what the bovine bi-product is? Small mountains of manure dot the landscape not unlike the endless panoramic view of millions of evening stars. Producing beef is very environmentally taxing, creating nutrient-rich effluent which ends up in the water. Mother nature tries to clean up this foul water on her own but cannot. She needs help. So what better way is there than to employ floating islands to assist!

A 250 square foot island provides the equivalent of over an acre of wetland surface area for the microbes that remove harmful pollutants from the water. Added aeration can triple their efficiency. In case you're new to floating islands, they are made from recycled plastic similar to industrial cleaning pads glued together, with styrofoam cores added for buoyancy. They are planted with native wetland plants whose root systems penetrate the island and get the energy they need to grow from the nutrients in the water.

What can these floating bio-havens do for us? They remove pollutants effectively, help prevent algae, improve water clarity, sequester carbon, create oxygen, and mediate low concentrations of heavy metals/minerals. As an added bonus, they create wildlife habitat and are esthetically very pleasing.

If you have a pond on your property or live on a lake or next to a creek or river and would like to know more about floating islands, check out the web site: www.floatingislandinternational.com. A floating island may be just the help your water needs.

Benefits of natural landscaping and rain gardens to be explained

by Meredith Tucker

CFC is excited to announce our adult education programs for 2008. Unfortunately, the first program about coyotes will be history by the time this reaches you, but we hope our post card alerted you to it.

On February 23, at 10:00 a.m., Roger Bannerman will speak about rain gardens. Mr. Bannerman is a long-time employee of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and rain gardens are one of his specialties. He presents a program that we hope will motivate many of you to help the environment, alleviate flooding and water pollution, and add a beautiful feature in your yard by installing a rain garden or bio-swale. Please join us for coffee and this thought-provoking program at the newly restored barn at Vehe Farm, 23570 W. Cuba Road, Deer Park, Illinois. It is located on the north side of Cuba Road between Ela and Rand Roads.

On March 29, our third program will concern Native Plants in the Home Landscape, created and presented by the CFC adult education committee: Karen Hunter, Peggy Simonsen, and Meredith Tucker. We hope to inspire you to use more native plants around your home and in your gardens. As luck would have it, we will give this colorful presentation just a month before CFC's Native Plant Sale, allowing interested audience members plenty of time to place an order! Please join us at the Barrington Area Library, 505 N. Northwest Highway in Barrington. The program will begin at 9:30 on Saturday morning in the downstairs room near the main entrance. Come a little early for coffee. We hope to see you there.

Admission to all programs is free although we will gratefully accept donations to defray expenses. Please RSVP to 847-382-SAVE (7283).

Spring Creek Prairie restoration

Vast preserve sees jump in grassland birds thanks to volunteers and joint effort

by Tom Vanderpoel

The year 2007 brought significant gains in the historic restoration of Spring Creek Valley Forest Preserve. This almost 4000 acre preserve system holds the key to resurging biodiversity in the southern Barrington area. CFC, Cook County Forest Preserve District, Audubon Chicago Region, Friends of Spring Creek Forest Preserves, The Barrington Hills Riding Club, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Sierra Club Northwest Group, Harper College, and others have joined forces not only to work on large-scale restoration but also to develop a restoration model showing how different groups can contribute to accomplishing a shared goal. CFC is one of the volunteer partners. Our niche will be experienced advice, invaluable local ecotype seed donation, and detailed restoration work near the gravel hill remnant called Spring Creek Prairie.

In the last two years this gravel hill prairie has progressed from an imperiled ecosystem surrounded by trees and alien brush to a jeweled crown, reigning over two hundred acres of eventual prairie and wetland in the valley below. Great towering oaks sit cleared of brush at the top of the prairie, and both the oaks and prairie are now flooded with sunlight and breezes that will help keep them healthy in perpetuity.

Other groups are doing the same thing in at least five different spots in these preserves.

Although we are intent on preserving all the biodiversity at this site, our immediate objective is to reverse the decline of prairie birds. These birds, once so common, are in serious trouble nationally. Grasslands are either being plowed under or invaded by alien brush, preventing their successful nesting. Ground-nesting birds have no place to go, but at Spring Creek, due to our work, they are returning in ever greater numbers. Populations of bobolinks, eastern meadow larks, the prairie sparrows, dickcissels and others are on the upswing. The evidence is so compelling it is a clarion call on how restoration can make a difference.

CFC's Grigsby Prairie will be a major beneficiary of our work at Spring Creek. An already thriving prairie, Grigsby is blessed with a surprising population of prairie birds, but the birds are vulnerable to inclement weather during migrations. If Grigsby Prairie were a lone island, bird populations could be difficult to maintain for the long haul. However, a giant neighbor just two miles to the south will produce surplus prairie birds just looking for new locations to colonize.

For years CFC has struggled just to keep the Spring Creek gravel hill prairie from disappearing. The momentum has changed and reinforcements are coming from all sides. The preserve will be reborn letting its plants and animals survive and thrive. It will take generations for full health to return, but every year we will see dramatic improvements. The rebirth of the prairie depends on individuals' being willing to step up and make it happen. We have scheduled several workdays this winter, so come and be part of the renewal. Volunteer!

Paul Hoffman, 84, helped lead CFC into pro-active open space protection as president, board member

Paul Hoffman, who was President of Citizens for Conservation from 1986-90 and served on the board of directors before and after his term as president, died recently in Selah, Washington where he had lived for several years. Paul's combination of educational background, corporate experience, love for the outdoors and expertise in community service made him the right person at the right time in CFC's development and expansion. He was president when Citizens for Conservation advanced from a period of accepting donations of land as our only means of acquiring it, to a realization that pro-active measures, including purchase of ecologically important and at-risk lands, needed to be added to the organization's operations.



Wendy Paulson gives retiring President Paul Hoffman an award at the 1991 Annual Meeting.

Dr. Hoffman remained an interested CFC member and donor throughout the years.

Rain garden journal

Established plot thriving; soggy resident opts for natural landscaping

Editor's Note: This article concerns two separate rain garden projects. The first part is an update on last issue's rain garden; the second part describes a newly installed series of rain gardens and bio-swales.

by Meredith-Tucker and Karen Hunter

My rain garden made good progress throughout the fall, finishing with a magnificent display of great blue lobelia that lasted for many weeks. Providing a dense vegetative cover, the palm sedge and common bur sedge continued to thrive as did the wool grass. Now that December has arrived, the garden is painted in shades of brown — lacey, tan cinnamon ferns, lobelia spires, and feathery sedge plumes. These dormant plants will remain standing for the winter as the birds and little creatures appreciate the shelter and the remaining seeds. I plan to cut the stalks in early spring.

In November, I purchased and sowed seeds of several species already existing in the garden, including cardinal flower, great blue lobelia, blazing star, winged loosestrife, and three sedges. I stratified half of the seeds of each species, storing them in my extra refrigerator to sow in the spring. I will never know which method is most successful, but I am improving my chances for success by using two techniques. Last year I stratified seeds of side-oats grama, in late winter planting them in flats to germinate on top of my refrigerator. Then the flats went under lights in my basement. In early summer I hardened off the seedlings and planted them along one edge of the rain garden's berm, just inside the prairie dropseed border. 2007 was a spectacular year for side-oats, and I harvested an abundant amount of seed. Some I sowed directly onto the berm; some is still on the plants to provide food for wild birds; some is back in the refrigerator being stratified for sowing next spring. I feel quite maternal about these seeds because I grew them, planted them, and harvested them. The side-oats feel like my children with another generation on the way!

The most important issue with this rain garden during the winter is whether the pipe that delivers sump pump water from my basement will remain free flowing or will freeze. It is buried just beneath the surface of the soil



*Fall photo showing progress at Meredith's rain garden.
Photo by Meredith Tucker*

and has only a slight pitch before emptying into the garden as there is not much slope between the house and the bio-swale. As a precaution in November I insulated the exposed drain pipe where it exits the house with plastic bags full of New England aster seed heads and fluff. I used to buy hay or straw to insulate pipes, but why not have my native plants do double duty? The asters are so prolific that I will certainly not miss the seed heads that are insulating my pipes! Continuing for about twelve feet after the bags of insulation, I have placed double flakes of hay on the lawn covering the underground pipe, hoping it will keep the pipe clear in the coldest weather. I could have continued the hay corridor all the way to the outlet in the garden, but it is in my front yard and looks a little peculiar as it is. If this doesn't work, one can only imagine what I will construct next winter!

Early in December the first real winter storm of the season hit. First snow, then hours and hours of freezing rain fell, ending with liquid rain. The rain garden is handling the moisture but not as quickly as it did during the summer. One could expect this; those thirsty wetland plant roots are not operating at full speed now that the plants they nourish are dormant. Finally, toward the end of the year, I'm seeing the garden after a real accumulation of snow. The remaining plant skeletons are white with hoar frost waving above a billowing mantle of snow with occasional dark, narrow areas of open water — very striking!



One might not remember the rains of August, 2007, like the snowstorm of 1968, but it was a monumental natural

event producing several consecutive days of 100-year rainfalls. It rained so hard one summer evening that the water blew out our window well sending rainwater cascading into our newly carpeted basement. The following morning I saw we weren't the only family affected. When garbage day arrived, soggy carpeting and water-stained furniture was piled on almost every driveway. Our basement flooding involved many mitigating factors beyond our control, but as a consequence, we knew our front yard needed to be completely redesigned.

A traditional landscape company proposed numerous culverts, drains and drain tiles, all immediately directing the water away from the house. I knew the design would prevent flooding, but as a native gardener, diverting water seemed antipathetic. I was determined to have a better design. When I phoned a native landscaper, I was thrilled I'd found someone who spoke my language. "Too much water is not the problem," he stated. "It's the rate of travel and velocity." While it was too late in the season to plant, we agreed to have the land contoured this fall, so we would be prepared for next spring's rain.

First they seeded the area with native plants and then installed a coconut fiber roll as a baffle to slow the water

as it enters our property. More coconut fiber matting was unrolled to line the swales and prevent erosion. Coconut fiber is chosen for its ability to absorb and retain water without losing strength. It is 100% bio-degradable, and unlike the netting commonly used for newly seeded grass areas that traps and kills insects, coconut mats are safe for all wildlife. Its purpose is to prevent erosion until the native plants are established. From that point the water is directed into a swale with several deep areas especially designed to hold the rainwater. A small berm along our property's front perimeter protects us from future flooding. This berm has also been seeded and a coconut fiber mat added. The water then safely follows the swale alongside the house and is gradually dispersed into the side yard.

I eagerly await next spring to watch how the water flows and where it will puddle so that I can begin to select and plant appropriate native plants. Native gardeners get very, very excited about water puddles because they create the perfect environment for cardinal flower, great blue lobelia, and other beautiful wetland plants. I also have a feeling of satisfaction, knowing this new design will help our watershed and create much needed wildlife habitat.

A good read

Let the Mountains Talk, Let the Rivers Run: A Call to those who would Save the Earth

I just ordered my twenty – or perhaps thirty – something copy to give away of *Let the Mountains Talk, Let the Rivers Run: A Call to Those Who Would Save the Earth* by David Brower. So it is high time to highlight this thought-provoking book as a CFC good read. Actually, it's an essential read.

David Brower is considered to be one of the key designers – if not THE designer – of modern environmentalism. The first executive director of the Sierra Club and founder of the League of Conservation Voters, Friends of the Earth, and Earth Island Institute, Brower passed away November, 2000, at the age of 88, leaving behind a legacy both path-breaking and controversial.

Charles Kuralt wrote of him, "Nothing I have heard from anybody else has affected my thinking so deeply as what I heard from David Brower." In a complex, technological

world, it is astonishing that one man could make as much difference as he has made and is still making."

Let the Mountains Talk, Let the Rivers Run is Brower's account of the highs and lows of his controversial career and offers a tough, witty game plan for "those who would save the Earth." Written in 1995, his plan for visionary yet practical CPR – Conservation, Preservation, Restoration – is as valid today as ever and offers hope as well as a historical and political framework for viewing today's natural world issues.

E.O. Wilson writes of this book: "This is the testament of one of the few authentic sages of our time. Brower's voice is passionate, perfectly cadenced, humorous, and very wise. And original: while most writers point to where we are, this one draws the map."

Add this book to your reading list, and I guarantee you will then add it to your shopping list as you think of graduation, birthday, holiday, teacher, hostess gifts and more. You'll be sharing a vision for our planet that is particularly essential at this juncture of environmental awareness.

— Jo Seagren

Restoration report

Assault on reed canary grass on tap; '07 yielded bountiful seed harvest

by John Schweizer

CFC's restoration year ends about a month ahead of the calendar year. By Halloween the annual yield of seed has been harvested, cleaned, sorted and mixed, and volunteers head back outdoors for perfectly appropriate winter work: cutting, hauling, stacking and burning invasive woody vegetation.

But back to the harvest. Beginning last spring, from our own preserves and from remnant patches along local railroad rights-of-way and assorted other spots, CFC volunteers collected and processed an amazing 240 pounds of seed – *after cleaning* – from 146 species of native grasses, forbs and other herbaceous natives. Under the direction of restoration director Tom Vanderpoel, the individual yields were custom mixed into 22 barrels of eleven distinct seed groups, for dry mesic prairie, open savanna, wet meadow, and so forth. At current retail prices, that's at least \$30,000 worth of native seed, according to Vanderpoel.

Because native habitat restoration work requires a regional approach, CFC shares some of its seed with several other restoration groups in the area as well as with governmental units. This year, CFC donated seed to Cuba Township Road District for its Cuba Road Prairie, to Cook County Forest Preserve District (five barrels) for the large scale Spring Creek Valley restoration, to Fox River Country Day School in Elgin, to the Village of Barrington for the Baker's Lake savanna restoration, and to the Village of Deer Park for the small restoration at Vehe Farm.

CFC's never-ending battle against non-native vegetation doesn't focus on all alien plant species; only aggressive and persistent invaders are targeted – buckthorn, honeysuckle and assorted herbaceous species – because they choke out most native vegetation, corrupting wildlife habitat.

Happily, no patches of purple loosestrife, perhaps the most dangerous non-native, were reported last year at CFC preserves or worksites. We herbicided isolated specimens at Grigsby Prairie and Flint Creek Savanna.

Cattails can take over a wetland in a season or two shrinking its biodiversity. Volunteers applied herbicide to emerging clumps of cattails in two marshes at Flint Creek Sa-

vanna. Populations of yellow and white sweet clover were weak in 2007 thanks to relentless weeding by volunteers during the prior year. It was easy pulling at Baker's Lake, Flint Creek Savanna, Spring Creek, and Grigsby.

Our biggest nemesis at present is reed canary grass, an aggressive, tenacious non-native that thrives in sun or shade, on dry soil or wet. It out-competes most native herbaceous plants, except maybe sedges. We herbicided large infestations of reed canary grass along the floodplain at Flint Creek and at Grigsby Prairie last season; follow-up applications are planned for this year. However, reed canary grass is particularly entrenched at two critical sites at Flint Creek Savanna – throughout the "Original Grove" oak savanna near Brookside West and around the savanna south of the CFC silo. An outside contractor will apply the initial herbicide, and qualified CFC volunteers will handle the critical follow-up.

From now until spring, restoration volunteers are continuing last year's clearing of buckthorn and honeysuckle thickets around Barrington's jewel of biodiversity, Baker's Lake savanna. Views of the island rookery are unobstructed.

After being cleared of brush and non-native trees, the open hickory and oak woodlands provide dappled sunlight for grasses and forbs (wildflowers). Last year we essentially completed the clearing of a large multi-species brush thicket that had overgrown much of the recently acquired Flint Creek Savanna parcel off Henry Lane.

This winter we're continuing with "detail" (*i.e.* thorough) brush-clearing at our gravel slope prairie restoration site in Spring Creek Valley Forest Preserve and doing maintenance brush removal at the precious bit of remnant prairie we're restoring at Ela Marsh Forest Preserve.

Thanks to...

...**Walter Dalitsch** for donating his seed cleaner. These old seed cleaners are very valuable to restoration groups.

...**Staples** for their generous contribution to support CFC in our commitment to enrich the areas where Staples' associates and customers live and work.

...**The Silbrico Corporation** for the generous donation of 36 bags of perlite and to **Ginger Underwood** who coordinated this valued contribution.

From the Staff Director

Peggy Richards hailed for role in Grigsby's restoration success

At the recent Village of Barrington Hills 40th Anniversary Gala, Citizens for Conservation and the Village of Barrington Hills honored Peggy Richards for her extraordinary generosity and exemplary stewardship in donating, over a number of years, the 42.5 acres in Barrington Hills that is now Grigsby Prairie, named for Mrs. Richards' father.

Work on this renowned restoration of an Illinois tallgrass prairie began in 1986. The work is ongoing and exhilarating. CFC restoration volunteers gather and sow seed in the fall, carry out controlled burns from fall through early spring, and pull weeds throughout the summer.

Native plant diversity is one of the goals for restorationists, and Grigsby now provides habitat for 150 species of native plants in wet, mesic and dry prairie, a wetland and savanna. These plants include prairie grasses such as big bluestem, little bluestem, Indian grass, side-oats grama and switch grass. Fascinating herbs include three kinds of gentian, compass plant, prairie dock and rattlesnake master, among many others. Grigsby has become such a rich source for the seed of these native plants that CFC now shares it with other restoration projects in the greater Barrington area.

Because of the restoration of appropriate habitat, nesting birds at Grigsby Prairie now include meadowlarks, bobolinks, grasshopper sparrows, sedge wrens, king birds, savanna sparrows, red-headed woodpeckers and bluebirds.

The prairie is an often-visited educational resource. The Garden Club of Barrington and the Little Garden Club sponsor the Nature Lady Program which brings the third graders of Barrington School District 220 to Grigsby each fall "to learn about the eco-system and to use their senses to better understand the uniqueness of the prairie." Many of the Nature Ladies have truly "adopted" Grigsby and delight in fostering its understanding and appreciation.

Representatives of garden clubs in the Midwest Region of The Garden Club of America were invited to a guided tour of the prairie this fall and were asked to, "prepare your senses, bring your cameras, and be prepared for a



Sam Oliver, CFC Staff Director (left) and Jo Seagren of Barrington Hills, present an original drawing of a bobolink (Margaret Hudson, artist) to Peggy Richards (center).

Photo by Laura Ekstrom

special afternoon swishing through tall grasses, listening to birds and insects chirp, smelling the coneflower seeds and seeing a piece of a native prairie."

Peggy Richards has been described as a "true conservation hero," and CFC is pleased to honor her vision through all that happens at Grigsby Prairie.

— Sam Oliver

CFC's loyal, devoted volunteers mark end of harvest season with big bonfire, heaps of zesty chili

by Sharon Pasch

A bonfire and bowls of steaming chili kept everyone warm on a pleasant November evening as about 25 CFC volunteers and friends celebrated the end of the seed cleaning season. Topics of conversation drifted from families to vacations to backyard wildlife, touched briefly on heavy metal, and always came back to CFC's accomplishments and plans.

Three kittens which had been found in the garage/shed won over many hearts as they were passed around at the dinner table. Thanks to Melissa Washow, the kittens now have a better home.

Patsy Mortimer posted an impressive chart listing the quantities and characteristics of each of the 146 species of seeds collected in 2007.

There was plenty to celebrate!

CFC annual meeting Feb. 7

Agenda includes update on local prairie restorations, exhibits of local wildlife on the mend

by Julie Zuidema

Be sure to mark your calendar for Thursday, February 7, 2008, to enjoy an evening celebrating the past year's accomplishments. Citizens for Conservation's 37th Annual Meeting will be held at the Barrington Area Library, 505 N. Northwest Highway. We will start at 6:30 p.m. with an opportunity to socialize with friends, sample refreshments and visit with education birds from Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation.

As a special feature this year, we invite you to help support injured and orphaned wildlife by bringing a donation for Flint Creek Wildlife Rehabilitation and Barnswallow. Both non-profit organizations are active in the Barrington area caring for injured wild birds and other wildlife. Financial gifts are always appreciated; however, you may choose to bring any of the following items that are always needed by the rehabbers: paper towels, bleach, anti-bacterial dish soap, wipes and/or

spray cleaner, chemical-free laundry detergent, fleece blankets, shelled, raw and unsalted pecans or walnuts or nuts in the shell.

The program begins at 7 p.m. and will feature the popular environmental economist Don Coursey from the University of Chicago in a challenging and thought-provoking presentation. The event also honors our conservation heroes with awards for service and delivers the annual financial report. Tom Vanderpoel will provide an always appreciated "Year in Review" including CFC restoration work, our children's programs and Flint Creek Watershed plans.

Cathy Bayer has donated conservation themed fleece blankets for silent auction – just the thing to snuggle under while we wait for spring! All we need to make the Annual Meeting complete is YOU. Please reserve your spot by calling (847)382-SAVE (7283) to RSVP.



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