

# Prairie Crossing at Twenty

## January 2015: Environmental Features

*By Erin Cummisford, Prairie Crossing resident & Liberty Prairie Foundation staff member*

*On December 16, 1994, John & Marianne Conway purchased the first Prairie Crossing home at 1494 Potawatomi Road. Twenty years later, Prairie Crossing is a thriving community & a nationally renowned example of how conservation principles can be integrated into a suburban neighborhood. Throughout 2015, we will celebrate this 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary by sharing history & unique features of our home community. Whether you are a new or long-time resident, we hope this will deepen your appreciation of Prairie Crossing.*

### **Environmental Protection & Enhancement**

Prairie Crossing was developed around ten Guiding Principles that provide the framework for a way of life that respects the environment & enables residents to experience a strong connection between community & the land.

This month we focus on the Environmental Protection & Enhancement Guiding Principle. Prairie Crossing's land was purchased to safeguard its open spaces & 350 acres are legally protected from development. We are part of the Liberty Prairie Reserve, 5,800 acres of public & private land that includes forest preserves, farms & trails. More on the Liberty Prairie Reserve in a future newsletter insert!

Prairie Crossing's site plan & greenways protect the environment, native vegetation & wildlife of the Midwest. Read on to learn more about some of Prairie Crossing's environmental treasures.

### **Stormwater Management**

Through careful planning by experts from Applied Ecological Services & the Prairie Crossing environmental team, Prairie Crossing developed an innovative solution for stormwater management. The Applied Ecological Services Stormwater Treatment Train™ has since been implemented in multiple other locations.

The stormwater collection system mimics nature by using long-rooted native plants to slow & purify rainwater & snowmelt on their way through a series of bioswales, wetlands & prairies to the lake. The resulting high water quality allows swimming in Lake Aldo Leopold,

which is technically our detention basin!

This system decreases surface runoff volume by approximately 65% as compared to a more typical development. Most nutrients & sediment are removed before the water reaches the lake, which is good for Prairie Crossing & the overall Des Plaines River watershed.



*Rainwater collects in a bioswale along Hedgerow as it flows out of homeowners' yards, into nearby wetlands & eventually to Lake Aldo Leopold.*

The Stormwater Treatment Train combines cluster development & stormwater best practices in a unique overall management system. It also creates an attractive habitat for wildlife & residents – abundant prairies & wetlands leading into the beautiful Lake Leopold.

For more information, read the Applied Ecological Services case study & Stormwater article, both linked in the Press Room at [www.libertyprairie.org](http://www.libertyprairie.org).

## Threatened & Endangered Fish

Sanctuary Pond is the first incubator in Illinois for fish threatened with extinction & possibly the first in the U.S. – right in our neighborhood!

In 1998 the pond became a sanctuary for threatened & endangered fish species through a pilot project of the Liberty Prairie Foundation, PCHOA, Integrated Lakes Management & the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Sanctuary Pond was chosen because no streams flow into it & water quality can be controlled. Because of this, there is also little chance larger species of fish would enter the refuge.

The five native species of threatened & endangered fish introduced in 1998 – Banded Killifish, Blackchin Shiner, Blacknose Shiner, Iowa Darter & Pugnose Shiner – continue to thrive. To improve fish diversity in other lakes, fish transfers have occurred to Lake Aldo Leopold & several Forest Preserve Lakes.

The Sanctuary Pond project was awarded a Conservation & Native Landscaping award in 2011 by Chicago Wilderness.

The Shedd Aquarium is studying Sanctuary Pond to gain a better understanding of how fish populations can be reestablished in urban/suburban waterways.

Consider this the next time you walk on the trail surrounding Sanctuary Pond on the north end of Prairie Crossing.



*Sanctuary Pond (located between Harris Rd., the horse pastures & Osage Orange) is preserving the future of 5 threatened & endangered fish species.*

## Environmental Management

Each ecological unit of Prairie Crossing's common areas has a long-term science based management plan. This Environmental Management Plan is submitted to the Board each year by the Liberty Prairie Foundation & provides the framework for stewardship activities undertaken each year.

Prairie Crossing's environmental work is done by contractors as well as volunteers on the Environmental Stewardship Committee (ESC). Led by Jim O'Connor, volunteer field supervisor, the ESC provides a valuable contribution to the restoration & maintenance of our natural areas.

In 2011, ESC members created the Prairie Crossing Environmental Handbook. This guide contains information about our natural areas, as well as advice for your own yard to support Prairie Crossing's focus on enhancing the environment through native plant species.

Though some sections are outdated, the Environmental Handbook remains an excellent resource. Download it from [www.pchoa.com](http://www.pchoa.com) or <http://tinyurl.com/PCenvironmentalhandbook>.

Thank you to the ESC for making a difference in Prairie Crossing's prairies & wetlands! New ESC volunteers are always welcome – watch for workday announcements in Meadow Mix or the pcho email group. Exercise, education & fun!

Learn more about Prairie Crossing at [prairiecrossing.com](http://prairiecrossing.com) & [libertyprairie.org](http://libertyprairie.org).

Need a glimpse of Prairie Crossing during warmer weather? Take a virtual tour of Prairie Crossing at [www.libertyprairie.org](http://www.libertyprairie.org) or <http://tinyurl.com/virtualltourprairiecrossing>.

**NEXT MONTH:** Stories from Prairie Crossing residents. What brought you here? Has PC influenced your lifestyle? What does PC mean to you? Tell us at [www.facebook.com/prairiecrossingcommunity](http://www.facebook.com/prairiecrossingcommunity).