

# Big Island e w s

[www.bisawpa.org](http://www.bisawpa.org)

*A newsletter dedicated to the preservation of Big Island, Illinois*



*Fall 2019*

## A Salute to Our Flood Fighters

It was a full court press protecting Big Island during this year's three historic river crests. Thanks to the Big Island River Conservancy District for their tireless efforts fighting the flood, along with a little help from their friends.

*At right, member Tom Kost (purple hat) and helpers fill sandbags to protect neighborhood homes.*

*Below, member Ray Bender cuts down a leaning tree to avoid compromising the integrity of the levee.*



*Blackhawk Township Road Commissioner Bruce Stickell and Rick Thompson delivered a 6" pump to the West Ponding Area. They were assisted by BISA WPA members Matt Groothaert, Kurt Jensen, Al Clausen, Mike DeSchinckel, and Randy Wlaschke. **At right,** Randy (in green) and BISA WPA member Mike DeSchinckel clean muck from the pump intake hose. Somebody has to do the dirty work!*



## Hennepin Canal Trail Stewardship: Xstream Cleanup

We're looking for a few good men....and women...and scouts to give us a hand again this year during our annual Xstream Cleanup on October 26th. You can sign up by going to the [bisawpa.org](http://bisawpa.org) website. Signing up early guarantees you a free Xstream Cleanup t-shirt!

Last year's cleanup was held on October 27, 2018. The number of volunteers from Moline Boy Scout Pack 119 doubled in size, so we were able to direct some of the eager scouts in picking up trash along Big Island Parkway. The rest of the group removed invasive species and overgrown branches to keep the primitive trail leading to Lock 32 accessible for users and safe for mowing.

After hours of hard work, hungry volunteers enjoyed a taco lunch provided by Royal Neighbors Big Island/Milan Chapter 20174 at the Whistle Stop Java Shop in Milan.





## Lock 31 Improvements . . .

### Seal Coating

Using part of the funds from the Julie A. Hubbard donation, the Big Island Soil & Water Preservation Association was able to seal coat the walk/bike ramps at Lock 31. Below the hard-working crew from Milan Black Top pose for a pic after the work was completed.



### Handicapped Bridge

George Bellovics, Illinois Department of Natural Resources Landscape Architect and Kyle Goetz, Assistant Site Superintendent for the Hennepin Canal State Parkway (below) take measurements for the proposed Handicapped Bridge at Lock 31. Once clearance is received from the State, BISA WPA will apply for grants to fund the project. We are also looking into installation of a boat ramp in this area for small fishing boats and kayaks ... But that's down the road a-ways. (Or should we say canal?!!!)



## Remove Weeds, Plant, Mulch – Repeat Yearly...

Not so fast! Soon our Pollinator Prairie Garden at Lock 31 will be self-sufficient and will do what a prairie does, according to Martha Smith, University of Illinois Extension Horticulture Educator. She has been overseeing our garden since it was planted in 2017.

After looking at the garden this summer Martha said, "It is basically doing what a prairie does. We've lost plants ... most

likely due from overly wet soils and there is some clover and unwanted grassy weeds that can be pulled." So... Martha and her crew from the Illinois Extension Office, Master Gardeners, and BISA WPA volunteers, on one very hot day, cleaned out the clover and unwanted grassy weeds, added some new plants, and a light layer of mulch.

The garden continues to thrive due to our caring volunteers and folks from the Illinois Extension Office.



*BISA WPA President Randy Wlaskovich helps with weeding at the Pollinator Prairie Garden.*



*We're so grateful to our volunteers who help keep the Pollinator Prairie Garden looking beautiful. It is located at Lock 31.*

## Stop By and Sit a Spell

The memorial benches and engraved rock have been completed at Hennepin Canal Lock 31. Funds from the Julie A. Warn Hubbard Trust were used for this project. We think Julie would be pleased with this peaceful area to relax and enjoy the park, as she loved the natural habitats of Big Island.

We are also working with George Bellovics, Landscape Architect from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to apply for a grant to erect a handicapped bridge at Lock 31. This, in addition to the vault toilet being built by IDNR at Lock 31, will work towards completing Phase Two of our long-term goals.





## One More for the History Books ... Congratulations, Chris!

In June 2018, cyclists Dan Libman of Oregon, IL and Carl Nelson from DeKalb, IL set out from the beginning of the Rock River Trail at the Horicon Marsh State Wildlife area in Theresa, Wisconsin and were the first to cycle 320 miles to the end of the trail at the historic confluence of the Rock River, Mississippi River and Hennepin Canal on Big Island. The two made the journey in five days.

In June 2019, Wisconsin kayaker Christopher Luedke took the challenge to paddle 320 miles of the Rock River Water Trail and finish in five days. He set the speed benchmark for fastest descent of the river. Here's how his finish went down as told by Dean Mathias, Big Island Soil & Water Preservation Association Vice President and Rock River Trail advocate...

*"My wife, Deb, and I first spotted Chris at Green Valley Park in Moline and then met him further down the Rock River next to the 27th Street Bridge exit. Chris pulled out of the water while it was lightning and met up with his wife Megan and daughter Millie. He then headed to the Backwater Gamblers take out. There I told him it might be a good option to end the journey since it was after 6 pm and I wasn't sure about the condition of the portage for Lock*



*30 due to the recent flooding and there was fog on the water and thunder in the distance. [Dean may have underestimated the determination of someone who had already paddled more than 300 miles to get to the end of his journey.] Chris had the look of determination in his eyes. As luck would have it Carlos Barreto and his wife Shelley arrived soon after and put Chris back into the Rock River after a car portage around the Sears dam on Vandruff's*

*Island. Due to flooding at Lock 32, Chris made a beach landing instead at the west side of Sunset Park's Potter Lake where he was presented his 320-mile award."*

Whether traveling by bicycle or kayak you'll need 5 days to get to Big Island. Who knows, the next person traversing the Rock River Trail may hike it—wouldn't that be something! Any takers?

## Make New Friends...Get Your Exercise...GOAT!!! (Get Out And Trail)

You meet a lot of interesting folks on the trail. This year was no exception . . .

Mary Beth and her little girl (at right) frequently travel the Hennepin Canal bike/walk trail on Big Island to Josephine's Bakery in Milan where they stop for fresh baked goods. Mary Beth told us she wishes the trail would connect with her neighborhood to make it easier for her to access from her home. (One of BISAWPA's goals is to connect neighborhoods. We're working on it Mary Beth!).

This year's GOAT event included treats for participants and their four-legged friends. Tony and "Kelly" (far right) braved the cold and rain to stop by Lock 31 for a special treat at this year's GOAT event. BISAWPA's Lisa Miller and Barb Wlaskolich

hosted the stop at Lock 31 and Dean Mathias worked at Emeis Park in Davenport.

A big thanks goes to Becky Buckrop from the University of Illinois Extension office who made our GOAT signs. And, a thank you to members Dean Mathias, Lisa



Miller and Barb Wlaskolich for braving the cold, rainy weather to pass out water and treats during the event. Their community support is much appreciated!



## A Shout Out of Thanks to the University of Illinois Extension

The University of Illinois Extension is an instrumental part of BISA WPA's success. **Jenny Garner**, County Director, and her staff have extended their full support in reaching our educational goals and continues to be helpful in guiding us in the right direction.

### Special Projects:

**Russell Medley**, Extension Educator, Community and Economic Development, has guided and alerted us about special programs such as Geotourism. With his support and encouragement, we were able to produce a top-quality video showcasing the Hennepin Canal accepted by National Geographic for publication.

**Becky Buckrop**, Marketing & Development Program Coordinator, helped design and create the brochures for the Hennepin Hoopla. She tirelessly makes signs for our events, i.e., Get Out And Trail (GOAT) and applies for grants to continue funding the Pollinator Prairie Garden at Lock 31.

**Martha Smith**, Horticulture Educator, designed and helped plant our Pollinator Prairie Garden at Lock 31. Every year since, she's worked side by side with us advising us on what plants need to be purchased and replanted, making sure the health of the garden is at its peak.

**Tracy Jo Mulliken**, Program Coordinator, Horticulture and Agriculture, assisted us with securing top-notch educators for the Hennepin Hoopla. And, in addition to putting sweat equity herself into our Pollinator Prairie Garden project, she rounds up all of the volunteers every year.

We would also like to recognize **Kristin Bogdonas** and **Tayler Wheatley** for their special help during the Hennepin Hoopla.

An organization is only as effective as the support they receive. We are extremely grateful for the University of Illinois Extension's continued guidance and support. They make education fun!



*Pictured above, l. to r.: Martha, Tracy Jo, Becky, Tayler and Russell.*