



THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER



Winter 2020

SAVE THE DATE!

Saturday, April 25th

The 2020 Illinois Prairie Path Annual Earth Day Clean Up will be held Saturday, April 25th. This event relies heavily on volunteers. Please join us as a volunteer coordinator. Coordinators simply meet people at the designated location, distribute trash bags, and provide instruction on where to leave full bags. Please email us at info@ipp.org if you have any questions or would like to volunteer. We appreciate and need your support to make this event a success.

E-Bikes and the Path

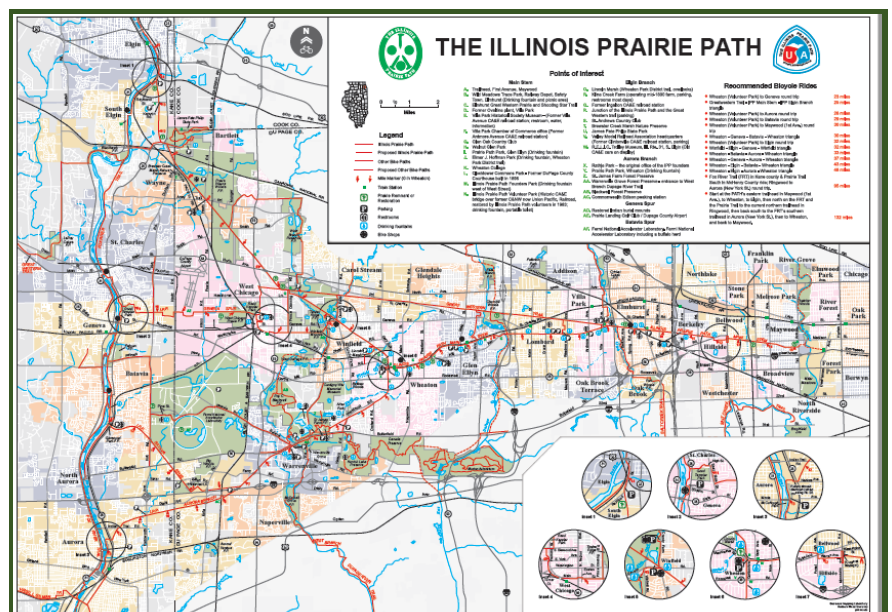
The popularity of E-Bikes has grown substantially over the past couple of years. Just to clarify, E-Bikes are not electric scooters or motorcycles, but are electric-assist bikes. They don't replace pedaling. Instead, they provide different levels of assistance to make pedaling easier. For many riders with health challenges, they provide a great way to maintain a healthy outdoor lifestyle that might not otherwise be possible.

However, there have been questions asked about whether or not E-Bikes are allowed on the Illinois Prairie Path. This is a very reasonable question, since all motorized vehicles are prohibited on the IPP, and also on most bike paths and trails across the US.

Here is the short answer. **E-Bikes are NOT considered motorized vehicles, per the Illinois Vehicle Code, which was amended last year for E-Bikes.** Therefore, E-Bikes are allowed on the IPP. DuPage County is considering implementing speed limits on all County paths at some point in the future, but nothing has been decided at this point. In the meantime, it's important to use safe speeds and be sure to practice trail etiquette for the benefit of riders and other trail users.

Trail Map of the IPP

The eighth edition trail map of the Illinois Prairie Path map is now available! When unfolded the updated map is 25 by 18 inches and printed on moisture and tear resistant paper. Both sides are in full color. The front shows all 61 miles of the IPP including the location of amenities, points of interest, mile markers and connecting trails. The back explains the Path's mission, history, relationship with partner organizations, trail etiquette, amenity details, and the importance of membership dues. Numerous details were updated but the most notable change was the addition of many connecting trails. We encourage you to explore the vast network of local trails! Although countless volunteer hours went into editing, there were significant costs related to formatting and printing. Membership dues and an REI grant funded this reprinting project. As a token of our appreciation, eighth edition maps will be sent to all IPP members this spring! We will continue to send maps to new members. Maps are also available for purchase at Midwest Cyclery in downtown Wheaton.





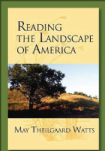
MAY THEILGAARD WATTS FOUNDER, ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH



EARLY PATH BEGINNINGS...

At age 70, May Watts wrote a letter to the editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, published on September 25, 1963 that began:

"We are human beings. We are able to walk upright on two feet. We need a footpath. Right now there is a chance for Chicago and its suburbs to have a footpath, a long one." Her ideas won the hearts of hundreds of people.



As the Naturalist and first Director of Education at the Morton Arboretum from 1941-1961, she earned the respect and loyalty of her colleagues, students, volunteers and supporters.



In 1966, May Watts (center) signed a lease with DuPage County, granting the founders the right to develop 27 miles of abandoned railroad land into a trail. She named the trail - the Illinois Prairie Path. As communities came together to build their small segment of the Path, word spread, and the Path gained nationwide attention.



In 1968, the U.S. Department of the Interior announced the nation's first National Trails Program.

On June 2, 1971, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Rogers Morton invited May Watts to be the keynote speaker at the announcement in Washington D.C. of the first National Recreation Trails. (The Illinois Prairie Path was in the first group of trails to earn the designation.)



An article titled Mrs. Watts by Ruth Wenner revealed, "Her understanding as a scientist, her curiosity that ranged far beyond mere botany, her love of storytelling, and her years as a one-room-school teacher lent a quality of universality to her teaching that could not be imitated." She spent the last 12 years of her life developing her beloved Path. She passed away in 1975.

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This issue's featured sign, located at Founders Park in Central Wheaton on the Illinois Prairie Path, highlights the accomplishments of the path's founder, May Watts.

multiple pages and documents of IPPc history to develop into each sign's narrative. Plus, she and Dennis Terdy reviewed several hundred historical photos selecting 3-4 key photos to underscore each sign's theme.

- Sid Kenyon - DuPage County contact, advocate, trail user, and overall great guy to have representing the IPP at DuPage County – DOT - helped with the submission of a complementing Openlands grant through Commonwealth Edison to finish this project.
- Jeff Friedman - Board Member and our "sign guy" - provided professional advice on where to put the signs, what materials to use, color choices, installation suggestions, and contacts with Marty Berent, the sign designer.
- Marty Berent - employee of Nameplate and Panel Technology and "artiste extraordinaire" - provided the final design for our signs and what a design it is! (Because of this work, we are using his designs for business cards, and possible newsletter logo and format redesign.)
- Thank you to all Illinois Prairie Path Board members for ongoing input and support for this project.
- Ken McClurg, IPPc Board Member, also acknowledged the REI grant role in supporting the eighth edition of the Illinois Prairie Path trail map.
- Erik Spande, Board President, presented this appreciation award to REI representatives.

REI Sign Dedication

As stated in our Fall 2019 newsletter, we will be featuring one of the recently installed Illinois Prairie Path signs. These signs are primarily a result of a *REI Stewardship Grant* received by the Illinois Prairie Path in 2018. The title of this grant was *The Illinois Prairie Path History and Heritage Initiative*. With submission of a complementing Openlands grant – through Commonwealth Edison, Prairie Path signs were designed and installed in four historically significant locations. A special recognition ceremony was held at Founders Park in Wheaton on Saturday, October 19th as an expression of thanks to REI and all involved in this sign project. Below is a summary of that event.

Erik Spande, IPPc Board President provided a welcome. Dennis Terdy, Board Member and grant writer provided the following comments:

"This ceremony was an expression of gratitude on behalf of the IPP Board to REI as well as an official recognition of those board members and others who were primarily responsible for the signs' development."

Acknowledgements

- Emily Leu, Justin Bates, and Theresa Salus - REI representatives - supported the grant throughout its development and implementation.
- Mary Jo Malach - Archivist, IPPc Newsletter editor, and former board member - supplied



REI representatives, Emily Leu and Justin Bates (on right), receiving the recognition award with other IPPc board members

2019 Annual Meeting

The Illinois Prairie Path Annual Meeting was held at Cantigny Park in Wheaton on November 3rd, 2019.



Mary Jo Malach receiving Certificate of Appreciation for her long, distinguished board service.

Erik Spande, Illinois Prairie Path Board President, provided an overview of the boards' activities and accomplishments. He presented the completion of 4 Prairie Path signs installed this past summer, which highlights the work of board members: Mary Jo Malach, Jeff Friedman, and Dennis Terdy, as well as design work by Marty Berent, employee of Nameplate and Panel Technology. Erik also announced the yearlong work of board member, Ken McClurg in revising and updating the Illinois Prairie Path map for the first time in over 12 years. In addition, he thanked retiring board member, Mary Jo Malach, with a lifetime membership for her dedicated service and, in particular, her extensive contributions to the Prairie Path Newsletter and her dedicated monitoring and transfer of Prairie Path archives to North Central College. The board will miss Mary Jo!



Attendees at the Cantigny Annual Meeting

Rob Sperl, IPPc Treasurer, provided a brief update on the path's positive fiscal status highlighting a strong and steadily growing membership base. We currently have over 800 members, which is our highest number in several years. Net assets did not change much this year and are just over \$163,000; although nearly \$67,000 is a trust that does not allow spending of principal. Revenue was approximately \$38,000. While dues were less than expected, we continue to see strong donations. Expenditures were approximately \$37,500 with a significant portion continuing to go towards prairie maintenance.



Larry Schaeffer, Prairie Path Plant Specialist

Larry Schaeffer, Prairie Path Plant Specialist, provided an overview with slides of work he completed at various sites on the prairie path, including the Maywood Trailhead, Hoffman Park in Glen Ellyn, Founders Park in Wheaton, and areas northwest near Army Trail Road in Wayne. He also presented before and after photos of vegetation and wild flower plantings and prairie path maintenance that he has performed throughout the year.



Sid Kenyon, Senior Planner, DuPage County, DOT

Sid Kenyon, Senior Planner, DuPage County, Division of Transportation (DOT) *Path Improvements 2019-2020*. Sid provided an update and overview of county projects related to recent work on area paths as well as new projects. Sid's updates outlined projects, including the Gary Avenue Trail, Great Western west extension, and the Eola Road Bridge near Diehl, being planned as an alternative to the current path, which frequently conflicts with parked railcars.

Keynote Speaker, **Mark Decker**, Landscape Architect at the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County. His topic was *DuPage County - Trail Development*. With this, Mark provided an overview of his division of the forest preserve highlighting its goal of "connecting people to nature" as a priority. Also, during his presentation, he provided an overview of bikeways in the county forest preserves highlighting current completed work and outlining the progress on numerous proposed trails throughout the county. In addition, he detailed the comprehensive start-to-finish steps of initiating and developing a trail in the forest preserve. In turn, he clarified why it may take several years to complete proposed trails even under the "right conditions" with strong public support and funding.



Keynote Speaker, Mark Decker, Landscape Architect at the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County

Special Note:

What was remarkable and encouraging about Sid Kenyon's and Mark Decker's presentations was the extensive coordination that occurs between DuPage County and the Forest Preserve District of DuPage County. In particular, this includes ongoing maintenance, planning, and overall trail coordination. Kudos to Sid and Mark and their respective agencies for their work on behalf of all of us in DuPage County!

Roger Kotecki, professional musician and IPP member, provided entertainment before and after the meeting.

TALKING TRAILS | WITH DUPAGE COUNTY



*In this newsletter, we will be initiating a new, ongoing feature, **Talking Trails**. In future issues, it will have updates from DuPage County on topics of trails, biking, and other related areas of interest.*

There are two upcoming closures on the Aurora Branch at I-88 to accommodate bridgework and the construction of a new underpass under I-88.

- The first closure is scheduled for 3-4 weeks which started on Monday, January 20th. The purpose of this closure is to relocate buried utilities prior to the bridgework.
- For the second phase, there will be a much longer closure of the same underpass from March 16th through July 10th. (These dates were selected so the path would be available for as long as possible during the summer months).

Upon completion, there will be a new 14'-high path tunnel in place of the current railroad underpass. The new tunnel will be lighted, and it will be decorated with a masonry IPP logo beside the entrance on both sides. In the future, the Illinois Tollway will be utilizing a similar tunnel design where the Main Branch crosses under I-294.

During the closures, there will be a detour for path users on the Batavia Spur. Going westbound, path users may travel along the Batavia Spur toward Eola Road. From there, they may turn southbound to cross the tollway, cross Diehl Road, and continue south toward the Aurora Branch bridge. At the bridge, path users may continue west. Eastbound trail users will have to descend to the east side of Eola Road and turn northbound toward Diehl Road to cross the tollway. They may continue east using the Batavia Spur in order to return to the Aurora Branch.



2019

October • November • December



Your membership and donations are used to provide services and fund improvements benefitting Illinois Prairie Path members and users.

New Members

William Barnett

Stanley Diddams

Tim Houston

Michael Nawroth

Richard Osborne

Donations / Gifts / Grants

Elmhurst Running Club

Fox Valley Bicycle & Ski Club

Grainger

Wheaton Garden Club

Donald Buss

Jacqueline Fritz

Patrick Henkel

Robert & Lisa Honig

Jerry & Kathy Jerabek

Mary & Dick Landis

John Luther

John Martz

Eric Peterson

Michael & Marilyn Schweitzer

Roger Smith

Leslie Sulla

Andrew Wildermuth