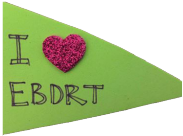




## THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER



Spring 2020



### East Branch DuPage River Trail Update

Perhaps you've heard the word: A new bike and hike trail with a very long name—the *East Branch DuPage River Trail* may be coming to the central part of DuPage County. Perhaps you're one of the 3,000+ people who have signed a petition to encourage transportation officials to make the long-awaited trail a reality. Or maybe you saw a presentation about the East Branch Trail during a community meeting that you attended. So, perhaps you're wondering what's next with the EBDRT?

The exciting news, and short story, is that DuPage County transportation officials are working on it. The longer news, and more tedious story, is that it's going to take a while.

#### Plans Are Underway

Last July, DuPage County kicked off the first in a series of meetings with a steering committee comprised of decision makers. They are all from a number of organizations representing the public property where the proposed path of the EBDRT is plotted. Officials from the County, the DuPage County Forest Preserve, Glen Ellyn, Lombard, the Glen Ellyn Park District, the Butterfield Park District, ComEd, Friends of the East Branch DuPage River Trail and a team from Christopher Burke Engineering discussed ideas and strategies to surpass the major barriers. Upon conclusion of meetings, a feasibility study will be conducted addressing final plans for construction and its associated costs. This is anticipated by mid to late 2020. With this, the county should be prepared to apply for federal transportation and other grants to support the EBDRT development.

#### Why the EBDRT Is a Win – Win – Win for Everyone

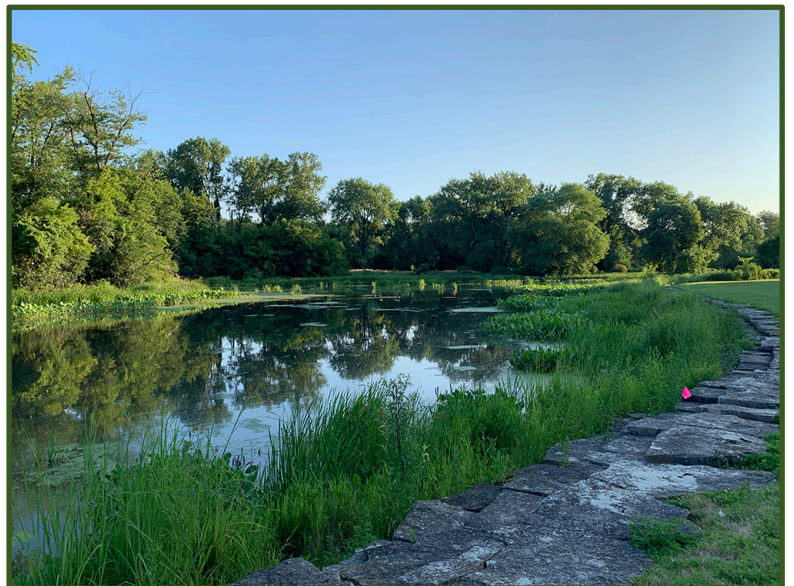
Officials in Glen Ellyn, Lombard, DuPage County and the Forest Preserve are motivated because they understand the many benefits the EBDRT will bring to DuPage County. The trail will connect folks who live south of Roosevelt Road in unincorporated Lombard and Glen Ellyn to the existing bike trail network consisting of the Illinois Prairie Path and the Great Western Trail. Folks from north of Roosevelt Road will be able to travel by trail to the Morton Arboretum where even more miles of beautiful scenery await.

#### Your Continued Help is Still Needed

Your support is still needed. It's easy for a project like this to slip to the back of the priority line unless the public continues to advocate for it. Be sure to sign the petition at [EastBranchTrail.org](http://EastBranchTrail.org) and encourage your friends, family and neighbors to also sign it.

With your strong, continued help, the East Branch Trail is going to happen, ideally by 2022, or 2023, construction should commence.

*Learn more: Visit [eastbranchtrail.org](http://eastbranchtrail.org) or join the Facebook group: search "The Trail Between."*



*This is just one of the spectacular views to be seen from the proposed path of the East Branch DuPage River Trail.*

## Great Western Trail Extension

I LOVE RAIL TRAILS!! Is that a strong enough statement? Anytime I get a chance to peddle my bike on a rail trail, I'm happy. I know many of you agree with this sentiment. That's why I was thrilled when the Great Western Trail was extended last year.

The Original Great Western Trail in DuPage County was one of the quickest conversions from a working railroad to a usable trail. I remember watching a railroad crew lift the rails and ties onto train flatbed cars, leaving behind only the "ballast rocks" on the rail bed. Months later, I was able to bicycle on the finished trail. That was in the early 1990's.

Fast forward to 2019. The Great Western Trail in DuPage County was extended from the Illinois Prairie Path's Elgin Branch (approximately 1/3 of a mile west of Prince Crossing Road in unincorporated West Chicago) west about 1 mile to Sassafras Drive. I know it may be hard to get excited about a 1-mile extension, but it opened up a new world to trail lovers like me.

West Chicago built a paved local trail years ago that connected the Great Western right-of-way to downtown West Chicago restaurants and train station. Now, the West Chicago local trail connects downtown West Chicago with the Illinois Prairie Path's Geneva Spur, the Great Western Trail extension, the Illinois Prairie Path's Elgin Branch, and with thousands of homes!

Here is an example of one of my favorite rides made possible by this new extension. I live in Geneva just across the Fox River from the western terminus of the IPP Geneva Spur. From my home, I bicycle east on the IPP Geneva Spur. Then I bike north on the local West Chicago Trail. Next, I head east on the Great Western Trail extension. I then hop onto the northwest IPP Elgin Branch. I transfer south to the Fox River Trail back home. I don't have to go out and back on the same trail!

One could bike from Winfield on the IPP Elgin Branch to the Great Western Spur. Then take that west to the local West Chicago Trail. Then take that to the IPP Geneva Spur. Finally, take that back home to Winfield. The possibilities are endless.



*Bob Sobie and friends heading West on the trails.*



*Bob Sobie and friends under the Route 59 Bridge.*

Give the Great Western Trail Extension a try! Walk or bike on the new Great Western Trail and you will see abundant wildlife and beautiful prairie plants. It's a great trail. It's a connector trail. Enjoy!

Written by Bob Sobie  
IPPc Board Member 2007-2013  
IPPc President 2008-2012  
First person to ride his bicycle on the IPP Crushed Limestone in Glen Ellyn



## Four New Commemorative Illinois Prairie Path Signs (Part 3)

The following is the third feature of four brief articles highlighting Illinois Prairie Path signs, which were installed this past summer. As mentioned earlier, the signs were funded through a grant from REI's Stewardship Grant Program and a complementing grant submitted to Commonwealth Edison's Openlands Grant program through DuPage County.

This issue's featured Prairie Path sign is located at the beginning of the Elgin Spur (about 1 block north of mile marker 0 and just north of the Metra tracks in west Wheaton). The "Let's Build a Bridge" sign recognizes the incredible accomplishment of the many volunteers who initiated and built the "Steel Bridge", the first prairie path bridge over the Metra West Line railroad tracks.

*Pictured Right: This issue's featured sign, located at the beginning of the Elgin Spur, highlights the accomplishments of the many volunteers who initiated and built the "Steel Bridge."*



### LET'S BUILD A BRIDGE

#### AT THIS SITE....1982



Phil Hodge, Path advocate and structural engineer (pictured) asked, "Why don't they build a bridge to cross over the tracks and roads in Wheaton?" Phil soon found out: There is no "they". There is only "we". He led the entire bridge project.



Walkers and bikers had to go down a steep slope to get to the Path on the other side of the tracks. One small railroad bridge and three cement support trestles remained from earlier railroad day.



#### VOLUNTEERS

...reinforced the old railroad bridge...  
...demolished one of the old cement supports  
...raised the two remaining cement supports by three feet



Students from DAVEA trade school built and welded three new large spans for a new bridge.



"We" (17 donors, 39 companies and municipalities and 89 Path Volunteers) created VOLUNTEER BRIDGE for \$25,000. The original construction estimate at the time was \$250,000. For 27 years, this VOLUNTEER BRIDGE stood as a monument to the determination of Volunteers and local communities.

DuPage County built a new bridge in 2010.

#### How can you help improve the Path?

info@ipp.org [www.ipp.org](http://www.ipp.org)

## Favorite Moments with May Watts, Path Founder, born May 1, 1893

Imagine growing up knowing May Watts, Path founder, as a family friend! Penny Schaschwary's parents, Ruth and Philip Turner, were friends with May and Raymond Watts. She explains her experience knowing May Watts and how May's passions and interests were woven into both her personal and professional life.

"Gardening - Sometimes May worked in her wildflower garden, to the west of her house. It was fenced in, with a picket fence, and had a small pond inside the enclosed yard area. She would let my siblings and I explore her garden.

Community - One time, when I was in high school it snowed so hard that I couldn't get home, because we lived out in farm country - south off of Bailey Road. My parents arranged that I'd stay overnight at the Watts' house. I enjoyed the cozy bedroom upstairs, with old ceramic wash pitchers, basins, and washstands. When I got up in the morning, May, Nancy and Ricky had made some breakfast. She made me feel both welcome, and quite a grown-up young lady.

Storytelling - My mother would sign us up for classes taught by May Watts at the Arboretum. She'd walk us around the Arboretum grounds, stopping at the occasional tree to have us sit, and she'd tell us a story about that tree. It almost seemed like a Native American story. Those stories were captivating! Often, we'd go back to the Thornhill building and do a craft from natural tree materials. One time we made Native American headdress - fun!!"



*May Theilgaard Watts*

# TALKING WITH TRAILS | DUPAGE COUNTY



DuPage County's trails network is currently open to recreational users. In accordance with Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines on preventing the spread of COVID-19, we respectfully ask that you please observe social distancing

while you are out on the trails. Please maintain a minimum of six feet of separation between yourself and other trail users as much as you possibly can. Also, please be courteous of other strangers' wishes to socially distance themselves as well. Be advised that parks and rest areas along the Prairie Path are likely to remain closed for the duration of Governor Pritzker's shelter-in-place order.



## Cancellation of Illinois Prairie Path's Annual Earth Day Clean Up

For the health and safety of our volunteers and in response to COVID-19 we reluctantly had to cancel our **Illinois Prairie Path Annual Earth Day Clean Up** previously scheduled for Saturday, April 25<sup>th</sup>.

**What does this mean?** Although there will be no coordinated effort, we encourage individuals to go out on their own to help keep the Illinois Prairie Path looking its best!

**What do I need?** Bring a trash bag on your next walk (before the vegetation hides the litter) and leave your full trash bags near a trashcan, or at the intersection of the IPP and a major road for easy pickup. Be sure to practice social distancing, wear gloves, long pants and sturdy shoes.

On behalf of the Illinois Prairie Path Board of Directors, **thank you** in advance for your assistance and for showing love to our path! We'll see you in 2021!

2020  
January • February • March

*thank  
you*

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

### New Members

John Stys

### Donations / Gifts / Grants

Bergen County United Way  
Hartford Insurance Company  
Network for Good  
Dr. Mark Grothman  
Patrick Henkel  
Thomas Hogan  
Quinton Jenson  
Randall Miller  
James Robinson  
John Schroeder  
Paul & Ann Witt  
John Woodhull

