



Friends of the Kankakee: Notes from the Field

Happy Spring! We hope that you have had time to connect with the natural world and the people that are meaningful in your life over the past few months.

Big changes around Friends of the Kankakee. Refuge Manager, Cassie Skaggs has taken a new position with the US Fish and Wildlife Service at Horicon Marsh. Congratulations to Cassie on her position. Anne is still working in her hybrid USFWS / DNR position.

As all of you likely know, there are lots of changes happening at the federal level, and at this time what changes will be impacting the USFWS and Friends organizations and Friends of the Kankakee specifically are unknown.

Friends of the Kankakee Board members, TJ Larney and Gus Nyberg, attended the Prairie State Conservation Coalition (PSCC) conference, and made great connections to other organizations and people in the conservation community. They were able to learn from our Illinois peers and importantly hear about how they are doing conservation work within their organization, funding sources for the work and PSCC shared ways they are assisting land trusts to do meaningful conservation on the ground and ways that we all can get engaged in the legislative process. Please visit prairiestateconservation.org to get involved.

There are many worthy organizations doing challenging and fantastic work, and their presence and work on the land gives us great hope. Learn more from our new website at friendsofthekankakee.com

Friends of the Kankakee Annual Meeting to be held on June 14 at 11 AM at the Okan Center

The annual meeting will be held at Okan Center located at 13851 E Central Ave, Hopkins Park, IL 60944 at 11 AM. We will have local food, the election of officers by our members and have a presentation about the work that Friends of the Kankakee has been doing, and what we plan to do in the next few years.

After the presentation, there will be an option to further conversation at Okan or caravan to Willow Estates and take part on a guided hike on Friends of the Kankakee properties.

Okan Center is run by Community Development Corporation of Pembroke & Hopkins Park, one of our conservation partners in the Kankakee and Iroquois County areas, based in Pembroke Township.

Please RSVP June 1st at nyberggus@gmail.com or info@friendsofthekankakee.com



How do we cultivate individuals to see themselves as part of the natural community and move them to act in a way that benefits the community?

Seventy-seven years ago, Aldo Leopold stated “We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect”.

Over the last three quarters of a century, Americans have moved more towards the artificial world of technology, with a smaller percentage of us gardening, hunting, fishing and spending time outside in anyway than previous generations. Today instead of time outdoors, we spend our time, consuming technology. A recent study from Yale finds that greater than 50% of Americans spend less than 5 hours outside a week and greater than 75% spend less than 10 hours. In some

ways, the artificial world can inform people about the natural world and connect people over long distances, but we know the majority of an individual's technology time is spent death scrolling and zoning out on videos. Data from a variety of sources clearly shows that successive generations of people in the 20th and 21st century are spending less time in the natural world (it's not all the internet's fault), and hence less time cultivating a connection to the land and hopefully seeing themselves as a component of the natural community.

America has long celebrated the individual. The individual that has pulled themselves up by their bootstraps and found success. Success at all costs and the end justifies the means mindset is well rooted. A common theme to these stories is that they are individualistic and do not recognize community. I would suggest that "heroic" self-made individual stories that we celebrate play a role in allowing people to act selfishly, at times to the community's detriment.

We all interact with and have an impact on the world through our use of resources and how we live in our environment and can all therefore be classified as stewards of the earth/ land/ waters. Yes, even the person that dumped the sofa set along the edge of the Friends of the Kankakee property that Craig, TJ and Anne picked up. The person who dumped the sofa set just isn't a *good* steward, because they are operating selfishly without regard to other people or for the natural world.



Good land stewardship encompasses a range of practices and strategies aimed at preserving and enhancing the natural quality of land. It is guided by principles of respect for the land and the species that make the land home, responsible management, and a long-term vision for the health and vitality of the environment and the surrounding community.

Not too surprising, Friends of the Kankakee has not been keeping the answer to how to cultivate respect and love for community from people and society, but we are leveraging the success the organization has had acquiring land over the last 20 years that connects 20,000 acres of important natural lands in Illinois and Indiana and are trying to address these questions with lands open to the public, hikes and workdays that connect people to the natural world, as well as facilitating people working together to improve the quality of the land for native plants and animals. We are engaging in the work of developing a connection to the land and operating with love and respect for the natural world and to each other.

May these seeds sprout, the roots run deep and gloriously bloom.



Upcoming Events

April 19 8 AM -2 PM Workday removing trash from the land. Friends has rented a dumpster for trash that was dumped on our 22-acre parcel in the past. There are small items and large items. Gloves will be provided. Attend for all, or as much as is a good fit for your schedule. We would really like your help to clean this site and make use of the dumpster that we rented. ***Don't worry, you don't have to be there the whole time. Any time you may have this day will be a great help!***

May 10 10-noon hike the USFWS refuge trail. Meet at the refuge parking lot.

May 17 8-11 AM Workday focused on the removal of honeysuckle. We will meet at the corner of Deer and Pike in Willow Estates.

June 14 Annual Meeting 11 AM Okan Center (see page 1)

June 21 8-11 AM Workday. We will meet at the corner of Deer and Pike in Willow Estates.



All events rain or shine, there is no bad weather, just poor preparation.

To RSVP please send an email to **Gus Nyberg** nyberggus@gmail.com or text/ call 765-427-4345

You may be reading this and wondering to yourself, gosh darn I am not free on Saturdays as I am balancing the many demands to my life that come from a variety of worthy sources (we all want more time after all), but I do want to help Friends of the Kankakee connect people to the land and improve the natural quality of the land.



If the answer to the above is, how can I help, we have opportunities for you. Whether as a land steward, working on individual projects, helping administratively or leading/ taking part in community outreach, there are many ways to help us better be the glue that pulls 20,000 acres of thriving natural habitat together. Please reach out, and we can discuss about projects that are a good fit for you. Ghandi stated, "The means may be likened to a seed, the end to a tree; and there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree."

The way we go about connecting with each other and the land is important. We aim for honest, welcoming, meaningful and enjoyable experiences for people and engage in work that makes the land and us richer, healthier and more connected as a community.

Friends of the Kankakee has a website up and running. Hooray!! Please visit friendsofthekankakee.com, and learn about the work that we and our US Fish and Wildlife partner are doing, sign up for an opportunity to see the rare orange fringed orchid in July that we have pictured on the front page, donate financially to help us do more stewardship/ land acquisition / outreach and pass it on to others. With a larger village, we can do more for the natural & human world today and create a better tomorrow.

Friends of the Kankakee formed to support the protection of land along and in the Kankakee River watershed many moons ago. Most of our work has been in the oak savannas that connect natural areas in Indiana and Illinois. We are

interested in expanding our impact and honoring our roots and have created a new fund to protect lands along the Kankakee River in Indiana, called the Indiana Grand Kankakee Marsh Fund. The Indiana Grand Kankakee Marsh Fund will be used to purchase lands along the Kankakee River in Indiana. The lands protected by the Indiana Grand Kankakee Marsh Fund, like all of our lands, will be forever wild areas for the native animals and plants and a refuge for those of us that love the natural world.

What will your mark be on the world?

Introducing Our New Executive Director: TJ Larney

Hello Friends of the Kankakee!

I'm thrilled to introduce myself as the new Executive Director for Friends of the Kankakee! It's an honor to step into this role and to help the organization grow, especially after being selected by the Board of Directors to ensure we continue to thrive and make a positive impact. From a young age, I was always outside—whether it was exploring the woods, hiking along riverbanks, or simply soaking in the beauty of nature. My love for the natural environment has only deepened over time, and I'm excited to now be able to help preserve and protect these spaces for future generations.

I'd love to connect with you! If you'd like to schedule a meeting or just have a conversation about the future of Friends of the Kankakee, please don't hesitate to reach out. Contact information is below.

Warm regards,

TJ Larney

Executive Director, Friends of the Kankakee

Email: TLarney4@gmail.com & Number: (708) 707-8545

Please make a 2025 membership contribution and consider a contribution to IN Grand Kankakee Marsh

Friends of the Kankakee

PO Box 13 Watseka IL 60970

Electronic donations can be made on our website at friendsoftheKankakee.com.

Land conservation has a long horizon like the prairies of this land. As you do your estate plan, consider supporting Friends of the Kankakee and sand / river country conservation with a legacy gift through your estate. Gifts can be a fixed amount or a percentage of your estate. To do so, instruct your estate preparer on how you want to include Friends of the Kankakee. Please reach out with any questions.

If you use social media. Friends of the Kankakee has a new Facebook page. We post events and natural observations at **Friends of the Kankakee 501c3**. Follow us, share posts and help us grow our following and keep up to date.

Thank you to everyone that has given their time and treasure to conservation and to the organization. Your support is essential, seen and appreciated.