



Wild Things 2007 Conference

Northeastern Illinois University, Sat 3 (see daily listings).

Imagine a future in which Chicago's summers are warmer and drier, increasing the need for irrigation and the demand on the water supply. Fish have a tough time as rising water temperatures deplete their oxygen supply; pests like mosquitoes thrive as winters get shorter and, as a result, tropical diseases like malaria begin to spread.

Chicago State University chemistry professor Richard Treptow sees that future for our natural environment—unless we take action to prevent climate change. Along with dozens of scientists and environmental experts, Treptow will give a lecture at the Wild Things 2007 Conference, a one-day workshop with more than 80 seminars on the subjects of nature preservation and wildlife protection. The conference is a chance for specialists—as well as volunteers and laymen—to network, swap ideas and learn about the latest advances in the conservation field. Because the focus is on indigenous flora and fauna, Wild Things also provides a different and locally proactive side to the popular, Al Gore–spurred climate-change rhetoric.

Treptow will speak on “Global Warming: The Choice Is Ours”—a presentation divided into sections on the causes, consequences and cures for climate change. “The cure begins at home,” Treptow says, stressing a known culprit—the lack of fuel efficiency in cars.

The emphasis on local solutions also extends to something most of us Midwesterners don't consider: biodiversity. Like the oft pointed-to rain forest, the less romantic plains play an important part in ending climate change, according to Steven Packard, director of Chicago Audubon Region, who will deliver a talk titled “Increased Diversity in Prairie Restorations.” Like planting trees, reintroducing big-rooted prairie plants in the Midwest removes the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through photosynthesis. Packard points out: “The grasslands secure huge amounts of carbon underground,” and in effect, they curb climate change.

Dennis Paige, a self-described “environmental maverick,” applies biodiversity to seemingly incongruous residential development in his talk, “Creating Native Eco-Gardens in Sterile Green Residential Association Landscapes.” He reviews his efforts to cultivate native plants—like milkweed butterflies, Virginia bluebells and swamp white oak—at his Schaumburg condo.

For urban denizens, commissioner Sadhu Johnston of the Chicago Department of Environment will discuss the city's environmental initiatives: utilizing alternative transportation, green construction techniques and tree planting. So those who own neither condos nor cars can still pick up practical tips.—John Greenfield

For lecture times and details, see www.habitatproject.org/wildthings.