



Attorney John Simmons Donates Island for Conservation, Research and Education

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Alton - Local Attorney and Philanthropist John Simmons has donated a 170-acre island, appraised at \$250,000, to the Lewis and Clark Community College Foundation to be utilized by the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center (NGRREC).

An official signing of the deed to the Foundation will take place at 9:30 a.m. Thursday, Aug. 23 in the lobby of the Jerry F. Costello Confluence Field Station.

The forested island, located in Calhoun County in the Upper Mississippi River, provides an ideal setting for both research and conservation, said Dr. Lyle Guyon, NGRREC terrestrial ecologist.

"By gifting this land to the Foundation for NGRREC's use, John Simmons is conserving and allowing NGRREC to sustainably manage the island's natural floodplain forest and wetland communities, which will ensure that they continue to provide benefits to the numerous wildlife, waterfowl and migratory bird species dependent on riverine habitats," Guyon said. "In addition to initiating a long-term ecological monitoring project to study the vegetation and wildlife which inhabit this part of the river, the donation of this island to the Foundation will also allow NGRREC researchers to actively explore the effectiveness of specific methods to restore habitat diversity, as well as the long-term impacts of those efforts on wildlife communities."

Guyon said the land will also provide an educational location where Lewis and Clark and the University of Illinois (both partners of NGRREC) will be able to train the next generation of ecologists.

"The Palisades Nature Preserve, a 430-site also managed by NGRREC, provides us with a great upland site near Grafton," Guyon said. "This island, which is a floodplain site, will offer us the opportunity to conduct additional types of research that will complement the activities we have already undertaken in the river bluffs near Grafton. Additionally, this new site will allow us to expand environmental research, education and outreach activities related to the entire river corridor."

Lewis and Clark Community College President and NGRREC Chair Dale Chapman said Simmons' gift will prove an extremely useful site for the long term monitoring projects NGRREC is currently conducting along the rivers.

"This island, which is located adjacent to Rip Rap Landing State Fish and Wildlife Area and Clarence Cannon National Wildlife Refuge, provides an ideal setting for both conservation and research," Chapman said.

"Mr. Simmons first approached me about the donation of the island in January, and by April the Foundation Board had voted to accept the gift, following an environmental study of the property," Chapman said. "After much planning and discussion about the types of research this site will provide, I know the NGRREC staff of scientists and researchers are pleased to finally see this site donation finalized."

"Since 2003, I've had the pleasure of owning and visiting this small island," said Simmons. "I'm pleased to pass the island to the Foundation for use by the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center. This River Bend area has an abundance of wildlife and natural history. I'm happy my donation will help in the mission of NGRREC to protect and sustain the river environment."

NGRREC is an innovative center for research, education and outreach located near the confluence of the Mississippi, Missouri and Illinois rivers in East Alton, Illinois. The National Great Rivers Research and Education Center is a partnership of Lewis and Clark Community College, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the Prairie Research Institute's Illinois Natural History Survey.

NGRREC is situated in a unique position near a significant yet relatively unstudied ecosystem created by the confluence of the three rivers. Few ecosystems are as closely linked with the development of human civilization as great rivers, and few ecosystems have been as greatly altered by humans. Sustaining both the ecological and economic health of the Mississippi and other great rivers requires research that addresses critical areas such as invasive species effects on native biota, habitat restoration, nutrient fluxes and strategies to reduce inputs to marine systems.

The Center's scholars and scientists study the ecology of the big rivers, the workings of the watersheds that feed them, and ties to the river communities that use them.

NGRREC aspires to be a leader in scholarly research, education and outreach related to the interconnectedness of big rivers, their floodplains and watersheds, and their associated communities.

NGRREC was the winner of a 2011 U.S. Water Prize.

For more information about NGRREC visit www.ngrrec.org.