

# UIS opens field station at Emiquon

By **CHRIS YOUNG**

OUTDOORS EDITOR

[chris.young@sj-r.com](mailto:chris.young@sj-r.com)

HAVANA — The University of Illinois at Springfield opened its Emiquon Field Station on Friday, promising to share what is learned with the rest of the world.

UIS constructed the \$270,000 building on The Nature Conservancy's 7,000-acre Emiquon Preserve in Fulton County, across the Illinois River from Havana.

The field station was built to help students and scientists track the progress of the floodplain as it is restored to wetlands.

## Open house

The University of Illinois at Springfield Emiquon Field Station will be open to the public from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. today. For a map, visit [www.uis.edu/emiquon](http://www.uis.edu/emiquon) and click on the open-house item in the "Latest News" listing.

The Emiquon floodplain was once home to a pair of backwater lakes and was a productive area for fish and wildlife. The lakes were drained and the wetland cut off from the Illinois River by a levee in the 1920s.

Despite 80 years of agriculture, the contours of both lakes remain, and wetland plants are sprouting from a seed bank nearly a century old.

This spring, 69,000 ducks were counted using the preserve at the peak of migration. Currently, about 1,700 acres of water covers a large portion of the site that is visible from Illinois 78/97.

One unique feature of the research station, apart from the laboratories, is a classroom wired to be the building's "electronic nervous system," said Michael Lemke, director of the UIS Emiquon Field Station.

The "smart" classroom lets instructors teach over the World Wide Web or bring guest speakers from distant locations to Emiquon.

Students and faculty studying the Parana River at Maringa State University in Brazil likely will exchange lessons and information with their counterparts at the Emiquon Field Station, according to Keith Miller, UIS professor of computer science.

"This smart classroom is our connection to the rest of the world," Miller said. Student exchanges between the two countries are possible,

"But we can do it for a lot less money electronically through the Web," he said.

Lemke said The Nature Conservancy provided a good foundation of information upon which students and researchers can build.

"A lot of foresight has gone into this project," he said. "The restoration is crafted on an exceptional scientific framework."

Subjects like ecology, geology and anthropology could be taught through lessons learned from the restoration.

Michael Wiant, director of Dickson Mounds Museum, located within sight of the field station, said the restoration and accompanying facility represent a "renaissance of educational opportunity."

"We now have an unprecedented opportunity to invite visitors to a living museum," he said.

His have been using the Emiquon floodplain for 12,000 years, and the restoration should give visitors insight into what the landscape was like before settlers from Europe arrived.

Dickson Mounds is another of the project's partners. A visitor center is being planned for the museum's first floor.

Leslee Spraggins, state director of the Illinois chapter of The Nature Conservancy, said the work done at the field station goes well beyond central Illinois.

"What we learn here is serving as a model for large river floodplain restorations around the world," she said.

While the wired classroom is an advantage for communicating beyond Fulton County, Lemke says nothing replaces hands-on learning.

"I think we need more real-world lessons and the chance to learn through the senses," he said of the experiences students will receive by conducting experiments and research on-site.

Lemke said learning opportunities are not limited to university students and professional scientists. All ages are welcome, he said, "from K to gray."

*Chris Young can be reached at 788-1528.*