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Illinois signs on to America the Beautiful Freshwater Challenge

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) commends the Biden Administration for launching the America the Beautiful Freshwater Challenge to conserve and restore America’s vital freshwater systems for future generations.

[The America the Beautiful Freshwater Challenge: A Partnership to Conserve and Restore America’s Rivers, Lakes, Streams, and Wetlands](#) sets a national goal to protect, restore, and reconnect 8 million acres of wetlands and 100,000 miles of our nation’s river and streams.

IDNR Director Natalie Phelps Finnie was one of numerous state, Tribal, and local leaders from across the country who convened Tuesday at the White House for a Water Summit, during which the administration announced a new national goal and partnership to conserve and restore freshwater resources.

The America the Beautiful Freshwater Challenge is a new initiative that supports states and other governments and entities, including Tribes, interstate organizations, cities, and local communities who are advancing their own policies and strategies for conserving and restoring America’s freshwater systems.

“Illinois’ lakes, rivers, streams, and wetlands are fundamental to the health, prosperity, and resilience of our communities and the wildlife that call Illinois home. They are the sources of clean drinking water, the backdrop for countless jobs, and the sites of outdoor recreation across the state,” **Finnie said**. “Now is the time to work together to use all the tools and resources available at the national, state and local levels to protect waters that are at risk from pollution, destruction, and other threats.”

Illinois is a water-rich state, physically and economically defined by Lake Michigan and large rivers that crisscross the state. Concerns about threats to Illinois’ freshwater sources were raised during the state’s 30 by 30 Task Force listening sessions in April 2022. The White House’s Freshwater Challenge offers another way to connect Illinois’ [Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy](#), the [State Water Plan](#), the [30 by 30 Task Force recommendations](#), the [IDNR Climate Action Plan](#), and other efforts, Finnie said.

On Tuesday, Finnie participated in a fireside chat on water conservation and protection at the White House, along with Vice Chair Frankie Myers, Yurok Tribe; Commissioner Katie Dykes, Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection; and Secretary Reid Wilson, North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

Illinois is a leader in many of the areas outlined in the Freshwater Challenge:

- Restoring stream connectivity and biodiversity through dam removal statewide.
- Addressing aquatic invasive species.

- Protecting groundwater through improved monitoring and regulations.
- Working in collaboration with other entities on Lake Michigan coastal resiliency through the IDNR Coastal Management Program.
- Implementing some of the nation's strongest floodplain management and public water standards for the protection of freshwater resources.
- Actively working to improve local community water system improvement plans to further the conservation and protection of freshwater resources.

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