

Conservation Congress 2014

The Results

Preserving Our Natural Habitats: Giving Focus to Habitat Acquisition and Management Needs

Recommendations:

1. Create promotional campaign to inform public of open space acquisition.
 - a. The Governor and IDNR Director should jointly openly promote land acquisitions.
 - b. While it may seem on the surface to be politically incorrect to talk about open space acquisitions when other budget cuts are being made (e.g., welfare), we are using dedicated funds for acquisitions. We need to inform the public of the difference and celebrate our successes.
2. Create a grant program to support acquisition and stewardship by IL Conservation Land Trusts.
 - a. Model this as a revolving loan program such as the one IEPA has for infrastructure improvements for water treatment plants.
 - b. Conservation Land Trusts can close acquisitions must faster than IDNR (IDNR takes 18 months whereas a Conservation Land Trust averages six months.).
 - c. Involving Conservation Land Trusts ensures that stewardship will continue after acquisition.
 - d. New York, Ohio, and Minnesota (Reinvest in MN) have programs that can be used as an example.
 - e. Investigate opportunity to use money received as a result of environmental damages to support grant program.
 - f. Look at opportunities of buy and hold programs to support this effort.
3. Create an IDNR policy that encourages IDNR to partner with Conservation Land Trusts or other conservation organizations to leverage funds when acquiring land.
 - a. Conservation Land Trusts close acquisition deals faster and cheaper than IDNR.
 - b. Including partners ensures local buy in and sustained stewardship of properties.
4. Create a strategic, prioritized land-acquisition-implementation plan for Illinois.
 - a. The plan should step down the broad goals and needs identified by the Wildlife Action Plan and other plans to more specific actions.
 - b. Regional needs and opportunities should be identified to better support local efforts.
 - c. The strategic plan generated by Clifftop is a great example.
 - d. Identify land acquisition needs in urban areas that must occur before key natural areas are lost to development.
 - e. Funding sources that can be used for each acquisition should be identified in the plan.
5. Foster development of regional strike or stewardship teams that serve contributing members in stewarding private land.
 - a. Model this after the SO IL Prescribed Fire Team, which serves private land.
 - b. Investigate utility of this model for serving public land.