

ILLINOIS ENDANGERED SPECIES PROTECTION BOARD

MINUTES TO THE 137th MEETING

MIDWIN NATIONAL TALLGRASS PRAIRIE

22 FEBRUARY 2008

(approved at the 139th meeting. August 15, 2008)

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Dan Gooch, Secretary Dr. Chris Phillips, Marilyn Campbell, Dr. Jim Herkert, Susanne Masi, Dr. Tom Nelson, Dr. Mike Retzer, John Clemetsen, Dr. John Ebinger.

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: none

OTHERS PRESENT: Kelly Neal, INPC; Tracy Evans, IDNR-OREP; Kathi Davis, IDNR-OREP; Glen Kruse, IDNR-ORC; Randy Nyboer, INHS and ESPB volunteer; Anne Mankowski; Dr. Jeff Walk, TNC; Robert Themer, Kankakee Journal, Rita Renwick; Will County Chapter, Illinois Audubon Society & Prairie Parklands Partnership.

137-1 Call to Order, Welcome and Introduction of Guests

Chairman Gooch called the 137th meeting of the IESPB to order at 10:00 A.M. Secretary Phillips called the roll call of Board Members. Meeting attendees introduced themselves.

137-2 Adoption of the Agenda

Chairman Gooch asked for a motion to adopt the agenda. Marilyn Campbell moved to adopt it; Dr. Ebinger seconded the motion. The agenda was adopted as presented.

137-3 Approval of the Minutes of Previous Meetings

Chairman Gooch called for a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meetings. Dr. Phillips moved to approve the minutes of the 135th meeting, Dr. Ebinger seconded and it was approved unanimously. Dr. Herkert moved to approve the minutes of the 136th, John Clemetsen seconded and they were approved as amended.

137-4 IDNR Staff Report

Glen Kruse, Chief of the Division of Natural Heritage gave his report. It is included below in its entirety.

137-5 INPC Report

Kelly Neal of the INPC gave the Commission's report. It is included below in its entirety.

137-6 ESPB/ Staff Report

Dr. Walk presented draft recovery plans for three bird species: Northern Harrier, Osprey, and Henslow's Sparrow. These were produced with State Wildlife Grant funding to Recovery plans for several more bird species are expected to be developed in the future.

137-7 Species Updates

Joe Kath was unable to attend, so Glen Kruse read excerpts from Joe's report, which is included below in its entirety.

Marilyn Campbell and Randy Nyboer commented on the results of the Mid-winter Bald Eagle Counts. Glen Kruse noted that the US Fish & Wildlife Service is investigating the destruction of a Bald Eagle nest in central Illinois.

Marilyn Campbell noted that there is concern over requests for withdrawal of acreage from CRP because of increased pressure for more corn and bean production.

Jeff Walk said that more CRP acreage will be available in several regions in Illinois, notably near Prairie Ridge State Natural Area and near South Shore State Park at Carlyle Lake. Enrollment may begin this year.

137-8 Board Appointments

The following Board appointments were approved by the Governor's Office: Marilyn Campbell, Tom Nelson, and John Ebinger. Paperwork has been sent to all three.

The following Board appointments are due to expire in May of 2008: Susanne Masi, John Ebinger, Mike Retzer. Chairman Gooch asked each if they were interested in re-appointment. Dr. Retzer and n Masi agreed to re-appointment. Dr. Ebinger announced that he will not seek re-appointment. He thanked the Board for the opportunity to serve and said that he will continue to serve until a replacement is found. Randy Nyboer acknowledged Dr. Ebinger's accomplishments and Chairman Gooch thanked Dr. Ebinger and promised official recognition at an appropriate time.

Chairman Gooch asked the Board to consider replacements for Dr. Ebinger and appointed Dr. Herkert and John Clemetsen to a nominating committee. They will provide a report on their activities at the next ESPB meeting.

137-9 ESPB Budget Status

Randy Nyboer brought the Board up to date on progress with filling a contractual position for a support person to assist the Board with their activities, including the impending Listing Revisions. IDNR proposes a three-year contract, the paperwork for which is currently at CMS. The position will be located in Springfield and the contract may be administered through the INHS. Chairman Gooch reminded the Board that he has appointed a subcommittee (Gooch, Herkert, Phillips) to draft a job description for this position. This description was incorporated into the contract by IDNR. Chairman Gooch will email the subcommittee's job description to the Board. Chairman Gooch stated that he is confident that the Board will be involved with the process at some level; perhaps by giving recommendations concerning the applicant pool to IDNR. In anticipation of this

involvement, Chairman Gooch appointed John Clemetsen, Dr. Retzer, and Dr. Herkert to a subcommittee to organize Board comments. Chairman Gooch commended IDNR Deputy Director Sgro for her commitment to filling this position.

137-10 ESPB Research Projects

Dr. Chris Phillips presented details of three research proposals that were discussed at the 136th ESPB meeting, but for which a final decision on funding was deferred until more information was received.

- Status Report for native populations of Shortleaf Pine (*Pinus echinata*).
- Status and Distribution of the Longnose Dace in Illinois
- Viability of the Blanding's Turtle in the Lower Des Plaines River Valley

Each proposal was discussed separately and the following actions were taken:

1) **Status Report for native populations of Shortleaf Pine (*Pinus echinata*):** Dr. Phillips summarized the new information received from Michael Jones. Susanne Masi moved to fund the proposal and John Clemetsen seconded. The Board voted unanimously to fund the proposal, including the tree ring analysis, not to exceed \$ 9,632.

2) **Status and Distribution of the Longnose Dace in Illinois:** Dr. Retzer informed the Board about the developments on this project and noted that one of the proposals was removed from consideration by the PI. The other proposal by Jeremy Tiemann and colleagues was modified to reduce the budget. Susanne Masi moved to fund the project at the reduced amount and Dr. Nelson seconded. The Board voted unanimously to fund this proposal at the new amount, not to exceed \$6,000.

9) **Viability of the Blanding's Turtle in the Lower Des Plaines River Valley:** Dr. Phillips supplied the Board with copies of the revised proposal before the meeting. The request is for \$14,381 for two years. Marilyn Campbell moved to fund the project and Mike Retzer seconded. The Board voted unanimously to fund the first year of this proposal not to exceed \$8,318.

137-11 Next Meeting Information

The 138th ESPB meeting will take place May 16 (Friday), 2008, 10AM at Giant City Lodge meeting room, Makanda. A show of hands revealed that several Board members are interested in a field trip on Thursday, May 15. Glen Kruse volunteered to contact IDNR staff in the area to set up an outing that includes glades/barrens communities in southern Illinois.

137-12 Other Business

137-13 Public Comment Period

Randy Nyboer introduced himself to the guests and discussed his history of involvement with the Board and his current involvement with the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory

Update and its progress. Chairman Gooch thanked Randy for his service to the Board, especially his recent volunteer activity.

137-14 Meeting Adjournment Chairman Gooch asked for a motion to adjourn the 137th meeting. Dr. Phillips so moved and John Clemetson seconded the motion. The Board approved the motion at 12:59 PM.

137-4 IDNR Staff Report

Illinois Department of Natural Resources Report to Endangered Species Protection Board February 22, 2008

Wildlife Preservation Fund

Receipts in 2007: \$204,974 - approximately \$4,000 more than was received in 2006.

Receipts in 2008: \$25,365 as of February 15.

Personnel

Todd Bittner, District 3 Heritage Biologist, left the Department effective January 25. Todd has accepted a job as manager of natural areas for Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. Todd's departure leaves us with just two district heritage biologists in Region 1.

Emily Stork and Cindi Jablonski, both Natural Heritage residents, have been hired by the Illinois Natural History Survey to serve as regional ecologists for the update of the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory. This leaves us with just one of the three residents who started in June. We hope to employ residents again in the new fiscal year.

Budget

Governor Blagojevich delivered his budget address on February 20 and his proposed budget for FY2009 was posted on the Internet later that day. The Governor's proposal includes no support for the ESPB for FY09.

Numerous news outlets reported that DNR would see a large cut in funding and would lose 200 employees under the Governor's proposed budget. The budget proposal would reduce the number of DNR employees, but this reduction would be the result of the transfer of the Natural History Survey, Water Survey, Geological Survey and Waste Management Research Center to the University of Illinois. There is currently no expectation of staff reductions at DNR.

Illinois Natural Areas Inventory Update

The INAI Update continues to move forward on a couple of fronts. The landowner contact protocol is being refined. Stakeholders are being contacted through newsletters and fact sheets.

The 5 regional ecologists who will be responsible for locating and evaluating new INAI sites have been hired and are in training. They are:

Northern Illinois - Cindy Jablonski
Central Illinois - Connie Carroll-Cunningham
Western Illinois - Megan J. Timpe
South Central Illinois - Emily J. Stork
Southern Illinois - Chris D. Benda

A map of the regions delineated for the INAI update and an INAI Q&A sheet are attached.

137-5 INPC Staff Report

To: Board Members

From: Randy Heidorn, Kelly Neal, and John Nelson

Date: March 4, 2009

Subject: Report to the Endangered Species Protection Board

I. Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Operations:

- A. Graduate Resident Intern Program
 - a. Emily Stork and Cindi Jablonski, residents working with Bob Edgin and Kim Roman respectively, took jobs as a regional ecologists with the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory.
 - b. Work has begun on getting approvals and posting of new resident interns, who would begin work in late June.

II. Protection Program:

- A. The following sites were protected at the 197th Meeting of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission in Springfield on January 31:
 - 1. Land and Water Reserves (LWR):
 - a. Addition to Iroquois Sands LWR, Iroquois Co. 1.5 acres (Friends of Kankakee), habitat for several endangered plants.
 - b. Big Grand Pierre LWR, Pope Co, 330.61 acres (IDNR), large block of forested habitat providing for several endangered plants and animals including Indiana and gray bats (*Myotis austroriparius* and *M. grisescens*).
 - 2. Preliminary approval for dedication as a Nature Preserve (NP) given to an addition to Dropseed Prairie NP, Cook Co. 1.176 acres (The Nature Conservancy), high quality mesic prairie of the Chicago Lake Plain Section of the Northeastern Morainal Natural Division providing habitat for several habitat restricted insects.
 - 3. Final approval of dedication as NP:
 - a. Two Additions to Gensburg-Markham Prairie NP, Cook Co. totaling 33.742 acres (The Nature Conservancy) high quality wet-mesic prairie and sedge meadow of the Chicago Lake Plain Section of the Northeastern Morainal Natural Division.
 - b. Hazelwood Forest NP, Lee Co. 43.7 acres (private owner), high quality dry-mesic and mesic upland forest of the Oregon Sands Section of the Rock River Country Natural Division.
 - c. Lowell Forest NP, Lee Co. 49.5 acres (Dixon Park District), high quality dry-mesic and mesic upland forest of the Oregon Sands Section of the Rock River Country Natural Division.
- B. Natural Heritage Landmark (NHL) documents have been submitted for Sugar Grove Foundation-Funks Grove NHL.
- C. Steve Byers continued meetings with staff of US Fish and Wildlife Service, and several other conservation agencies to discuss land protection opportunities and an unique opportunity to bring national wildlife refuge to northeastern Illinois. Attended meeting with single largest landowner of proposed Hack-ma-tack Wildlife Refuge area and other conservation groups and agencies.
- D. Mary Kay Solecki assisted Land Conservation Foundation Board with negotiating terms of a conservation easement with private owner of a river site upstream of Salt Fork INAI site; wrote site management plan and documented baseline conditions.

III. Land Acquisition:

- A. Steve Byers:
 - 1. Worked with Don McFall of IDNR and Save the Prairie Society regarding land acquisition at Wolf Road Prairie NP.

- B. Mary Kay Solecki assisted Grand Prairie Friends with acquisition of 9-acres of buffer land adjacent to Loda Cemetery Prairie NP.
- C. Judy Dempsey assisted Illinois Audubon and Faulkner family in the acquisition of the Henrietta Faulkner tract at the Cache River which was completed by end of 2007.

IV. Defense Program:

- A. Kelly Neal responded to seven reviews for IDNR's Comprehensive Environmental Review Program (CERP).
- B. John Nelson reviewed draft Class III Special Resource Groundwater technical reports for Braidwood Dunes and Savanna NP and Romeoville Prairie NP prepared by the Illinois State Water Survey under contract to the INPC.
- C. Randy Heidorn has been meeting with IDNR staff to facilitate restoration of the hydrology of the Cache River. This area includes several large areas included within the Nature Preserve System. Management of the Cache has been dependent on an in stream dam that periodically has been removed by the manager of the private property where the dam was constructed. The replacement of this dam will require several permits from the Corps of Engineers and IDNR, Office of Water Resources. Additional technical data is required before a permit can be issued. INPC staff has agreed to use approximately \$75,000 of NAAF Defense appropriation for FY2008 to complete this needed study.
- D. Steve Byers met with representatives of Village of Barrington Hills, Forest Preserve District of Kane County, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding threat posed by Comcast modification of existing tower adjacent to INAI – orchid site in that Village.
- E. Mary Kay Solecki provided input to IDNR consultation staff regarding a proposed wind farm on Don Gardner's Prairie Restoration INAI site, Ford Co.
- F. Threat issues involving sites in INPC programs:
 - 1. Wolf Road Prairie NP - Steven Byers
 - a. Issue: Proposed residential development (27 houses) on two 5-acre lots located west of Wolf Road Prairie NP.
 - b. Threat: Potential impact to surface hydrology; specifically degradation in water quality and changes in flow rates entering the NP and NP buffer. The proposed development will directly impact ten acres and negatively impact the current open space character of Hickory Lane Estates (there are ten 5-acre lots).
 - c. Status: Resolved. The two lots that were subject to development have been acquired by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County.
 - 2. Powderhorn Prairie and Marsh NP – Steven Byers
 - a. Issue: Residential/commercial development north of Powderhorn Prairie and Marsh.
 - b. Threat: Development could alter quantity and quality of surface and groundwater hydrology in vicinity of this NP. Also, development will further "fragment" Powderhorn Prairie and preclude viable landscape linkage with Wolf Lake located to the north. Development poses threat to State-listed E&T species. More extensive surveys should be conducted during spring/summer 2008.
 - c. Status: Staff of Commission met with IDNR, Corps of Engineers, consultants, developers, City of Chicago, and elected officials to review status of project. Hydrological issues currently being addressed with review of previously published hydrological studies. Project is on fast track with City of Chicago.
 - 3. Trout Park NP – Steven Byers
 - a. Issue: Surface water from interchange of I-90 Tollway and Rt 25 being directed into Trout Park NP.
 - b. Threat: Surface water from interchange has down cut a gully 50 feet long and 3 to 8 feet deep. During severe rainfall events, this surface water enters ground water discharge zones and creeks; posing threat to quality of ground water streams and the unique assemblage of aquatic insects known to occur from this site.
 - c. Status: Staff of Commission met with representatives of Illinois State Tollway Authority and their hydrologist/consultant this fall to review threat posed by surface water entering Trout Park NP. Intent is to raise awareness within that agency of threat posed by I-90 Tollway and secure funds to redirect surface water away from Trout Park NP.

4. Volo Bog NP, Lake Co. – John Nelson
 - a. Issue: Enforcement of Court Order to protect Volo Bog from adjacent mining and land development activities.
 - b. Threat: Adjacent Land development threatens quality and quantity of the groundwater resource that sustains Volo Bog.
 - c. Status: Jack Pease has submitted a preliminary development plan to the Village of Volo for zoning and approval of a light industrial complex. INPC staff attended INDR Consultation meeting with developer to address environmental concerns (1/17) and attended the Village of Volo's Plan Commission hearing on the same date.
5. Pistakee Bog NP, Lake Co. – John Nelson
 - a. Issue: Proposed land development adjacent to the preserve and INAI site.
 - b. Threat: Potential direct and indirect impacts to the high quality natural communities on and adjacent to the development parcel and potential impacts to populations of state listed plants and animals and water quality issues.
 - c. Status: Landowner interested in selling property and has submitted a letter of intent to the IDNR.
6. Edgewood Farm LWR and Salt Fork INAI site and, Vermilion Co. – Mary Kay Solecki
 - a. Issue: Enforcement of Consent Decree, staff assisted IDNR in identifying suitable restoration projects for consent decree for the Saline Branch/Salt Fork NRDA.
 - b. Threat: The planned restoration projects are a result of a University of Illinois ammonia release and subsequent fish kill that occurred on the Saline Branch and Salt Fork of Vermilion River in 2002 and killed over 100,000 fish. The Salt Fork is an INAI stream and Edgewood Farm LWR, which occurs along the river, was within the fish-kill zone on the stream.
 - c. Status: Reviewed consent decree and restoration plan and provided input to IDNR staff and Prairie Rivers Network.
7. North Dunes NP and Illinois Beach NP, Lake Co.- Randy Heidorn
 - a. Issue: Concern over asbestos containing material is interfering with management of the natural areas.
 - b. Threat: Concern about the exposure of ACM at the NP is delaying or precluding IDNR's ability to manage the high quality natural area. There is a need to survey any area after a management action (e.g. prescribed burned) for the presence of ACM, however funding for these surveys is inadequate.
 - c. Status: INPC staff has arranged to fund approximately \$83,000 to pay for surveys for ACM after management activities. These dollars will come from the NAAF Defense appropriation for FY2008. The contract change has been made.
8. Beall Woods NP – Bob Edgin, Randy Heidorn
 - a. Issue: The owner/lease holder of mineral and oil rights is in the process of renovating temporarily inactive oil wells on the property.
 - b. Threat: Currently there are two oil wells in the NP. One is temporarily inactive and the other is in disrepair and not in use. This is a violation of oil and gas regulations and does present a potential threat. There is no current surface agreement between the IDNR and the oil company. The oil company has come on the property and installed and removed various equipment including placing and taping a plastic propane line to signs and trees in the preserve to support a new, propane powered pump. There remain several structures including a separation pool that has a considerable amount of unknown liquid in it. Required screening is in place, but is in disrepair.
 - c. Status: IDNR has communicated to the company that they cease any further work until a lease is in place. IDNR Legal Council is drafting a letter demanding clean up and compliance with regulations and/or relinquishing of mineral rights to the IDNR.

V. Stewardship Program:

1. Kelly Neal coordinated staff review of the proposal to translocate Alligator Snapping Turtle to INPC sites. This proposal was approved by the INPC at the 197th Meeting of the INPC.
- B. Involvement with other organizations:

- a. Angella Moorehouse: continues to work with other government agencies and conservation organizations to establish the Quad Cities Regional Cooperative Weed Management Area. The goal of this group will be to facilitate cooperation among agencies and organizations for the purpose of controlling exotic and invasive weeds.
 2. Deb Newman participated in IWAP Northern Ozark Conservation Opportunity Area stakeholders meeting in December.
- C. Stewardship planning:
1. Staff prepared or update management schedules for several sites including:
 - a. Flora Prairie NP
 - b. Hazelwood Forest NP
 - c. Lowell Forest NP
 - d. Dixie Fromm Briggs NP
 - e. Carpenter Park NP
 - f. Dirksen-McNaughton Woods LWR
 - g. Illinois River Sand Areas LWR
 - h. Windfall Prairie NP
 - i. Miller's Rocky Branch LWR
 2. Tom Lerczak prepared special management recommendations for the on-going prairie restoration at Dirksen-McNaughton Woods LWR.
- D. Stewardship project implementation:
1. Several staff implemented or prepared the needed paperwork to implement Natural Areas Acquisition Fund Stewardship, WHIP, Northeastern Illinois Wetland Conservation Account and C2000 source projects.
 2. Angella Moorehouse, Mary Kay Solecki and Deb Newman worked with IDNR Natural Heritage Division staff on the implementation of the statewide Hill Prairie Project and State Wildlife Grant (SWG).
 3. Tom Lerczak, Angella Moorehouse and Deb Newman assisted in the implementation of the Landowner incentive program (LIP) by serving on various technical committees, proposing and selecting various projects and working with landowners in an effort to use this source of funds for stewardship of natural areas within INPC programs.
 4. John Nelson with the help of Steve Byers coordinated the implementation of the Stormwater/Fen Restoration Project at Bluff Springs Fen NP per the Fen Protection Plan and previous INPC approvals. This included coordinating discussions among INPC, Bluff City Material, Vulcan Materials, and Survey scientists and Forest Preserve District of Cook County regarding appropriate fill material types and costs, monitoring wells, ground water sampling and oversight of the actual placement of fill.
 5. Steve Byers implemented U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Landowner Incentive Program grants administered by The Conservation Foundation for stewardship of Illinois NPs that support the federally-listed prairie white-fringed orchid.
 6. Angella Moorehouse continues to work on the administration of SWG projects at Wapello LWR in Jo Daviess County and Siloam Springs State Park in Adams and Brown counties.
- E. Land management conducted by staff:
- a. Several prescribed burns were lead or assisted by staff including burns.
 2. John Nelson led volunteer workdays Boloria Meadows NP, McHenry Co., Boone Creek Fen NP, McHenry Co. Participated a workday at Gladstone Fen – McHenry Co.
 3. Steve Byers worked with Boy Scout Troop from Woodstock to complete management of Queen Anne Cemetery Illinois NHL.
 4. Kim Roman
 - a. Led two work days at Short Cemetery Prairie NP, removing non-native trees in a sand prairie.
 - b. Cut fire breaks at Superior St. Prairie LWR.
 - c. Thinned black oaks at Sweet Fern Savanna LWR.
 - d. Posted western boundary of Butterfield Creek Headwaters LWR.
 5. Tom Lerczak:
 - a. Removed hazardous stumps at Walden West LWR.

- b. Helped conduct a mussel removal project at Sugar Creek within the S.M. Bellrose NP in preparation for in-stream habitat work (through a CREP enhancement project).
 - c. Delivered signs to Sugar Grove Nature Center for Funks Grove LWR.
 - d. Installed new boundary signs at Goode's Woods NP, Denby Prairie NP, Roberts Cemetery Savanna NP, Culp Conservancy LWR, Chandlerville Cemetery Hill Prairie LWR.
6. Mary Kay Solecki:
- a. Coordinated or assisted with stewardship activities at 6 NP's /LWR's/NHL's (Barnhart Prairie Restoration, Sargent's Woods LWR, East Conkeytown NHL, Embarras Woods LWR, Prospect Cemetery Prairie NP, Westfall Prairie Restoration NP.)
 - b. Took photos at Baber Woods NP photo stations to document site conditions.
7. Deb Newman marked firebreaks for installation.

137-7 Species Updates

Report to the Endangered Species Protection Board

Submitted by Joe Kath

February 22, 2008

Hello:

I apologize for not being in attendance. Myself, along with members of the USFWS and other IDNR personnel are providing a massasauga workshop for Region 2 and 3 personnel today at Allerton Park in Champaign. This is the second workshop we have put on for DNR staff, County Forest Preserve Staff, Community Partners, etc. It has both a lecture and field portion and will teach participants how to search for and handle massasaugas. Other partners in this particular workshop include TNC, the City of Monticello, and some local landowners.

E&T Updates:

1. The fish ESTAC committee has looked at Gary Lutterbie's proposal to reintroduce starhead topminnows and weed shiners to Raccoon Creek. We think that it is a good idea and endorse the project.

2. AST Recovery Project:

-Travel request submitted for trips to Louisiana in 2008: April and October trips planned, currently awaiting approval

-Formal recovery team established: Scott Ballard, Mike Dreslik (INHS), Vic Bogosian (SIU), Meredith Mahoney (IL. State Museum), Bob Bluett, and Joe Kath

-Sub sample release with radio telemetry planned for April/May, 2008 in southern Illinois (will be contracted out)

-Recently received permission from INPC to release animals on INPC sites

-Pursuing purchase of juveniles from Tishomingo National Fish Hatchery

-ASTs from Glen Oak Zoo were transferred to the Jake Wolfe Fish Hatchery on Thursday, February 21, 2008.

-Permission granted from local Springfield landowner who owns several large ponds once used as a fee fishing area to use one of his larger ponds to deposit our turtles and allow for natural breeding. This pond will be fenced and electrified to deter predators. The pond is less than 2 miles from the IDNR Spfld. office which will allow for easy monitoring.

-UNIMIN Corporation has offered to construct breeding ponds in southern Illinois as well on their property if needed in future.

3. UNIMIN Corporation recently received the Wildlife Habitat Council's 2008 "Signature of Sustainability" Award for all of their conservation efforts - out of hundreds of companies like Amoco, Exxon, etc. only 20 companies received this award. Joe Kath was on hand for the ceremonies and represented the IDNR.

4. Wal-Mart ITA/Massasauga: Wal-Mart has reversed their decision to post-pone construction of the Carlyle Wal-Mart until 2009. They will begin work within the next few weeks - this should make the town of Carlyle happy.
5. Formal Conservation Plan for the massasauga associated with the I-294 expansion (Illinois State Toll Highway Authority) officially received by IDNR on 2/7/08. Some preliminary tree clearing to facilitate burning has already been accomplished under the approval of all partners including the USFWS, IDNR, FPD of Cook County - this was a long process, but in the end, a successful partnership. Chris Phillips may wish to comment more on this.
6. All responses to public comments for the incidental take involving the replacement of 3 bridge structures along Cisco-Monticello Road in Piatt County (impacts to massasauga) have been received by IDOT. These are currently being reviewed and a formal ITA is being considered. Chris Phillips was instrumental in helping IDOT address these comments and he may wish to comment further.
7. The public comment period for the replacement of the IL 15/IN 64 Wabash River Bridge in Wabash County, IL./Gibson County, IN. expires 2/23/08. The species of concern is the federally listed Fat pocketbook mussel. The Bloomington, Indiana FWS office is involved and our main FWS contact. After speaking with some DNR District Fisheries Biologists, one aspect of mitigation we may consider is a lump sum contribution to the Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund that would be used to initiate a mussel rearing/propagation program in Illinois - this is being done successfully by many surrounding states using "low-tech" measures - Joe Kath is planning on visiting Missouri's operation this summer with several biologists so we can begin such a program here in Illinois.
8. Conservation Plan for the narrowmouth toad, with potential impacts to the Illinois Cave Amphipod and Indiana bat was received by the IDNR on 2/4/08. This project involves the widening and resurfacing of 3,600 feet of Kaskaskia Road in a very sensitive karst area of Monroe County. Because a Federal ITA will most likely be needed, The IDNR is coordinating with both the Marion and Rock Island offices to accurately assess the situation.
9. Woodrats: Trip to Arkansas made last week by IDNR/SIU crew. A total of 19 animals were safely transported back to Illinois and released in southern Illinois. This puts the total number of animals released in Illinois near 300 and through trapping and telemetry work we do have signs of reproduction.
10. Potential wolf shot Tuesday, 2/19/08 in northeastern Illinois (north of I-80) - this animal has been confiscated by law enforcement and IDNR is coordinating with the FWS. Official DNA results will not be available for several weeks. A young man legally coyote hunting shot the animal from a distance and notified IDNR once he realized it might be a wolf. More details as they come in.

11. As part of the I-355 expansion, a 2 year bat mist-netting survey was conducted by INHS personnel in Cook, DuPage, Kane, <Kankakee, Lake, McHenry, and Will Counties. This survey resulted in 227 captures of 8 species at 37 sites. NO Indiana bats captured - which supports the current range map for this animal.

12. FWS has posted the 2007 rangewide population estimate for the Indiana bat on their website below with the state-by-state breakdowns for the four most recent survey years.

<http://www.fws.gov/midwest/Endangered/mammals/inba/index.html>

The total now stands at over 513,000 bats, which is a 9.4% increase over the 2005 estimate and is the highest estimate reported since systematic surveys began in the early 1980s. The 2007 rangewide population increase is attributed to significant population increases in Indiana, New York, Kentucky, and West Virginia.

13. White-nosed syndrome in bats: To date the WNS is found only in caves in Vermont and New York. This fungus and bat mortality is afflicting several species of bats. It is not just an issue for Indiana bat.

WNS has been found in and caused mortality of Indiana bats, little brown bats, northern long-eared bats, and eastern pipistrelle bats.

The majority dead bats have shown greatly reduced fat reserves.

Many of the FWS NE bat biologists are at a meeting in Atlanta this week.

Precautions: There does not appear to be a human health issue, at this time. This is based on the fact that the fungus was found last year and there have been no human ailments associated with WNS to date. However, we are advised to be very cautious until we understand WNS and what is happening to these bats. The FS should restrict access to caves and mines with hibernating bats. We do not have a closure order, but we can contact interested publics and politely explain what the situation is, the risk to bats and ask for their cooperation.

That's all for now - thank you.