

Across Illinois, constituents of the Department of Natural Resources are making their voices heard on issues of conservation funding, youth recruitment and retention, and public access to private lands. From Rockford to Sparta, Springfield to the Chicago area, committees of the Department's Natural Resources Advisory Board are hearing the public's views.

DNR constituents are passionate about outdoor recreation and conservation, but a major forum for their voice was taken away several years ago. As a past Conservation Congress participant and Executive Committee member, I know the value of this process.

At this critical point in the Department's history, with so many challenges to overcome, the need is great to provide that forum and give DNR advocates their voice back.

To meet the needs of the Department, the process for the new Conservation Congress will not be the same. It will be abbreviated, to reduce cost and demands on limited staff, and engage stakeholders in new ways, including the Internet. But the goal will be the same—to engage, inform, and activate constituents through a meaningful forum.

The mission of the new Illinois Conservation Congress is to propose and advocate actions that can be taken by elected and



appointed officials to protect and conserve the natural resources of the State of Illinois, and ensure through professional management that sustainable use, recreational opportunities and enjoyment of these resources is available for this and future generations.

Unlike the previous Conservation Congresses, there will be no delegate credentialing or regional caucuses. The Conservation Congress process is engaging participants in a number of ways that will help meet the needs of today and involve stakeholders throughout the process. To begin the process, the Natural Resources Advisory Board has formed three committees on critical issues with the task of developing reports and recommendations with public input and regional meetings. The goal is a series of reports with recommendations on these critical issues.

The Children and Youth Recruitment and Retention Committee is developing program and policy options to involve a new generation of youth in hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation activities, to improve the health and skills of youth, to support participation in activities that help fund conservation efforts, and to pass along

The Conservation Congress Web site is www.dnr.state.il.us/nrab/cc.htm. Notices of meetings are posted on the Web site. Copies of agendas, presentations, and interim reports are available there. Visit frequently to keep up with scheduled events and materials.

this important part of Illinois' heritage to a new generation.

The Public Access Committee is listening to what outdoor recreationists want from a public access program. They will evaluate past public access programs in Illinois, recommend survey data needed to determine which landowner incentives to open lands to public access have the greatest potential, gather ideas from programs in other states, and recommend needed changes to legislation.

The Funding Committee is reviewing options for meeting the long-term public funding needs for open space for outdoor recreation, preservation of natural areas, habitat and other purposes. It also will recommend policy and program options for meeting the public funding needs of activities and programs provided to the public by DNR.

A public comment period is part of each meeting, allowing for an exchange of ideas, and comments may be submitted to the committees at any time via the Conservation Congress Web site (see box)

On October 24-25, 2009, the Conservation Congress will convene in Springfield to review and consider the committee reports over a two-day conference.

This process will help mold the future of outdoor recreation and conservation in Illinois. I encourage you to get involved in this renewed forum, and I look forward to your thoughts and ideas.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marc Miller".

Marc Miller, Director

