



# Illinois Department of Natural Resources

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JB Pritzker, Governor  
Colleen Callahan, Director

## Illinois Thirty-by-Thirty Conservation Task Force Listening Session #3: Natural Lands and Waters

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**Date:** March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2022  
**Time:** 11:45 A.M. – 1:15 P.M. CST  
**Location:** Remote meeting via WebEx  
**Subject:** Listening Session on Natural Lands and Waters  
**Website:** [www2.illinois.gov/dnr/programs/30by30](http://www2.illinois.gov/dnr/programs/30by30)

**Members Present:** John Rogner, Todd Rettig, Mike Vanderhoof, Dr. George Czapar, Lindsay Keeney, Dr. Matt Montgomery, Jason Bleich, Jim Herkert, Olivia Schickel, Ava Nollen, Emma O’Lone, Paul Ritter, Ellicia Sanchez, Kyle Rorah

**Members Absent:** Sen. Jason Barickman, Sen. Dave Koehler, Rep. Robyn Gabel, Rep. Thomas Bennett, Emilie Collins, Brian Rennecker, Dr. Austin Omer, KJ Johnson, Todd Katz

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### Call to Order

- The meeting was called to order by Chair Rogner at 11:50 AM.
  - Chair Rogner gave a brief review of the task force’s origin and assigned responsibilities.
- Roll call was taken by Michael Lynch, DNR staff.

### Approval of Minutes

- Chair Rogner called for approval of the minutes of the previous meeting held 3/17/22.
  - Jim Herkert motioned to approve the minutes.
  - Olivia Schickel seconded the motion.
- The minutes were approved unanimously.

### Presentation on Conservation Efforts on Natural Lands and Waters

#### Introduction

- John Rogner, Chair, gave a brief introduction of the session’s topic.
  - Previous sessions focused on agricultural areas and urban areas, which together make up most of the land and water area of the state.
  - This session is on natural lands and waters, a huge landscape including both protected public lands and private lands and waters not included previously, the woods, the wetlands, the streams, and the lakes of Illinois.

- Today we will have three presentations, from Todd Strole of the Nature Preserves Commission, from Jason Bleich of the USFWS, and from Mike Vanderhoof from IDOT.

### Illinois Department of Natural Resources

- Todd Strole, of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, gave a presentation on several of the Department of Natural Resource's programs for conserving natural lands and waters.
  - The 30 by 30 effort in Illinois will require diverse ways of thinking because of the landscape we are in.
    - 67% of the state is cropland, followed by 5% pasture, 13% forest, 7% urban, 4% protected, and 4% miscellaneous
    - That 4% is really what we want to be expanding, so will discuss how to do that and how to get conservation value and ecosystem services out of some of those other landscapes.
  - Breaking down formally protected lands, the vast majority are publicly owned, either state, federal, or local.
    - Private is only around 5%.
    - Easements are also only a small share relative to fee simple ownership.
    - Have noted dedicated Nature Preserves on the chart, since the highest form of protection the state can provide.
  - Looking at how to expand the umbrella, there are many programs that are not fee ownership but provide conservation value: Conservation Reserve Program, Forestry Development Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and Illinois Recreational Access Program.
    - Structurally, most often done through a temporary easement, so not the same as ownership, but still worth noting that these cover more than all permanently protected land combined.
  - For land acquisition, the main fund used is Open Lands Trust, in addition to Natural Areas Acquisition Fund, but IRAP has added more acres in the past ten years than either of these despite having less funding.
  - IRAP allows hunters and anglers to receive access to private lands for recreational purposes, in exchange for funding and assistance to landowners for planning and implementing management activities.
    - Has covered 26,000 acres over the past ten years, across 47 counties, at a cost of \$1.7 mil annually.
    - To expand this, are targeting high demand counties and contacting properties enrolled in other programs
  - Forestry Development Program originates from the Forestry Development Act.
    - Taxes timber sales and provides a cost share to landowners for activities like timber stand improvement, control of exotic species, and wildlife habitat.
    - Limited only by number of willing landowners and district foresters/consulting foresters to write management plans.
    - Over 10,000 properties currently enrolled.
  - Forestry Legacy Program is smaller.
    - There three eligible areas, by Rock River, by Peoria, and in Southern Illinois.
    - Only 8 sites are enrolled, but there is potential for more.
  - Nature Preserves Commission focuses on the highest quality natural areas, in the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory.
    - Protected with both Nature Preserves and Land and Water Reserves.

- The Open Space Land Acquisition and Development Program provides grants to local governments.
  - Primarily for development these days, and public parks, but can be for more natural areas.
  - And next year will see the biggest round in years, over \$50 mil.
- Conservation Stewardship Program is another tax program.
  - Provides a property tax deduction for certified management plans of lands.
- Do not want to discount land acquisition, but the value of leases and agreements cannot be ignored either.

### US Fish and Wildlife Service

- Jason Bleich, a Private Lands Biologist for USFWS, presented on the Partners for Wildlife Program.
  - Since the 1980s, the program has worked with private landowners to install, restore, manage, and enhance habitat areas, separately from the Federal Wildlife Refuge system.
  - Provide some financial assistance, but their main expertise is in technical assistance for landowners that want to see more wildlife on their lands, often hunters and fishers.
  - Also work with farmers to identify and convert unutilized and underutilized land, as well as with local governments and even prisons.
  - Program focus is primarily on birds, threatened and endangered species, and native habitats.
    - Wetlands and prairies for Eastern and Northern Illinois.
  - Have three focus areas: Illinois River, Mississippi River, and the Prairie Pothole Region of Northern Illinois.
  - Base prioritization off of prior research, historical, aerial imagery, soil maps, etc.
  - Work with many other organizations, state agencies and nonprofits like Ducks Unlimited.
  - On financing, generally look for a 50/50 cost share, but sometimes can go up to 80% or 90%.
    - Over a 10-year agreement.
    - Never work on lands already getting federal financing or publicly owned.

### Illinois Department of Transportation

- Erin Holmes, Roadside Management Resource Specialist at IDOT, presented on the Department's efforts regarding conservation on Rights of Way.
  - Shared a video on efforts related to the Monarch Project, following Illinois Monarch Project mowing guidelines.
    - Mowing rights of way and replanting milkweed prior to monarch season and increase monarch habitat and allow for more eggs to be laid with fewer predators.
    - Never mow more than 1/3 at a time, to preserve habitat, and limited use of herbicides.
    - Allows creation of more pollinator habitat.
    - Have also registered Monarch Stations and worked with IDNR to distributed milkweed seeds.
  - IDOT operates over 400,000 acres of land at any one point, and try to use an Integrated Vegetation Management approach.

- Includes prescribed burns, mowing weeds, control, restoration projects, selective herbicides.
  - Adapted to the needs of the specific area with dedicated 3-5 year plans.
- They focus these efforts not on the immediate shoulder of the road, but the area beyond that within the ROW.
  - And areas within this that are priority areas for mowing are rotated on a 4-year schedule, and shifted timing within the year, to promote monarch and other pollinator habitat.
- SAVE program allows other road operators to apply to change their mowing, specifically to help the Rusty Patched Bumblebee.
  - Mowing only 1/3<sup>rd</sup> at a time.
- Roadways are not just connectors for people but for blocks of habitat across the state.
- Invasive species control efforts include detection, targeted herbicide use, spot treatment, etc.
  - And trying to clean equipment to not spread species unintentionally.
- Also partner with nonprofits, as well as other agencies specifically through the Monarch Plan and an additional MOU.
  - The Route 66 Monarch Flyway, a corridor from Chicago to St. Louis focused on habitat and education, including adding habitats to Scenic Byway trip planner.

### Listening Time (Public Comment)

- Domenico D'Allesandro, Regenerative Design Consultant
  - Presenting on a land ethic process for the confluence of the Rock and Kishwaukee Rivers.
  - The mission of the task force is to pursue bold action.
  - The taxpayer-funded air cargo expansion at the Rockport Airport violates the core intent of the 30 by 30 movement. Will propose an alternative.
  - The plan for the airport has not changed substantially since 1994, and no environmental assessment has been carried out on a final, graded master plan.
  - The expansion will require filling in land to keep it above the flood level.
  - Halting or moving the road expansion into the prairie is not enough, considering future expansions, so the best solution is to move the airport entirely to a different site.
    - This allows converting land around the airport into a green corridor and converting the buildings into other uses such as a convention center or hydroponic farm.
- Iris Caldwell, Energy Resources Center at the University of Illinois – Chicago
  - Have hosted the Rights of Way Habitat Working Group, bringing together energy and transportation groups from across the US and Canada.
    - Including roadways, utility corridors, railroads, solar facilities, and similar landscapes.
  - These create a network crisscrossing the state and connecting a variety of landscapes, so can create habitat corridors rather than fragmenting areas.
  - They have many advantages
    - Often managed in a state early of succession, helpful for growing scrub
    - Protected from future development
    - Under active vegetation management.

- Most relevant groups in Illinois are involved
  - Working to finalize the first nationwide conservation agreement for the monarch butterfly with the Fish and Wildlife Project, providing a mechanism for groups to voluntarily commit to create and maintain habitat.
  - Groups totaling 50,000 acres, including Northern Natural Gas, have committed, and working with others in Chicago area.
- Also brought groups together to create the Illinois Monarch Action Plan, goal of 150 mil milkweed stems added by 2038.
  - Have commitments of 100,000 stems from various organizations in the past two years.
- Bob Fisher, Bird Conservation Network
  - BCN is a coalition of 20 different organizations from the Chicago area.
  - Publishing “Breeding Bird Trends in the Chicago Region.”
  - Want to emphasize a few things
    - Need to broaden the understanding of what should be included in 30 by 30, what should be protected, including waters of Lake Michigan.
    - Need to encourage collaboration within the conservation community to secure consistent funding for management.
- Max Ciarlone, Illinois Student PIRG
  - Two football fields worth of pristine natural land is harvested every minute in the United States.
    - We are squeezing every cent of economic value out of these natural lands, but they should not be used just for their economic value.
  - Access to nature is a necessity for people, and is not provided for many.
    - We should be protecting as much land as possible, but only 4% of land is protected from development in Illinois.
    - That is a far cry from the already alarming 12% across the country.
  - For the sake of our physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing we must do more.
    - State should take every opportunity it has to acquire more land for parks and wildlife refuges, to protect biodiversity.
    - And to provide incentives to private landowners.
- John Wallace
  - Second that I hope the task force is actually ready to take bold action.
    - And concerned there are no lawmakers here.
  - Many reports are consistent that we need to take drastic action to stop this continual climate change disaster.
  - The single largest public land holding in Illinois is Shawnee National Forest.
    - Forests are the single-best mechanism to sequester carbon.
    - Unfortunately, there are 7,000 – 8,000 acres slated to be logged clear-cut right now in the Forest.
  - Research has made it clear that it takes 10-20 years for regenerative forestry to convert a forest from a carbon source to a carbon sink.
  - Encourage everyone to take a closer look, check out the documentary Shawnee Showdown: Keep the Forest Standing.
  - Propose that Shawnee National Forest is transferred from the Department of Agriculture to the Department of the Interior as a National Park.
    - Agriculture is focused on producing products, not protecting land.
    - Encourage you to sign the petition.
- John Rogner

- Would note that there are no lawmakers here because they are in legislative session today, conducting the business of the state, but they will be included in future meetings after session.
- Olivia Dorothy, American Rivers
  - Continue to be disappointed that we are still thinking about water as a product or afterthought of land conservation while the goals put land and water on equal footing.
  - Other states with protected land are still dredging rivers, and seeing pollution come from unprotected lands into rivers.
  - Fresh water species have the highest extinction rate per unit area, and in Illinois as well, biodiversity loss risk is highest in rivers and streams.
  - Disappointed there is no one from the Office of Water Resources talking about the dam removal program and how that benefits aquatic ecosystems.
  - There is need for new programs that focus exclusively on flood plain restoration.
    - When where we do land conservation in flood plains, often see levies that disconnect the river from the flood plain.

### Other Business

- Olivia Schickel
  - Wanted to give a quick update on the student survey, have over 100 responses and are having meetings in how to get those numbers up with various groups.
- Jim Herkert
  - Want to thank everyone, and agree that we should expand our view beyond strict legal protection as the speakers have indicated.
  - Would also welcome input into what people think should go into a broader definition for 30 by 30.
- Bob Fisher
  - Would want Lake Michigan to be included.
- John Rogner
  - Have not heard back from any of the Indigenous Nations we reached out to.
  - Will also be scheduling a wrap up meeting to discuss everything we have heard. DNR will take a first stab at distilling all of this testimony, coming up with questions for discussion.
- Olivia Schickel
  - Will also distill the survey responses for then as well.