

Illinois 30 by 30 Task Force

Report to the Illinois General Assembly

September 2022



“A conservationist is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke,
he is writing his signature on the face of the land.”

~ Aldo Leopold



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Executive Summary

The Illinois 30 by 30 Conservation Task Force was created by statute drafted by students at Pontiac Township High School and authorized by the Illinois General Assembly. The task force conducted three public listening sessions during the spring of 2022 to learn more about current conservation efforts in Illinois and to seek input on how to reach the formidable goal of conserving 30% of the state's land and water by 2030.

The Illinois 30 by 30 Conservation Task Force Act calls our attention to the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change that threatens our way of life locally, nationally, and globally. In 2019, scientists across the globe released findings that to avoid the worst impacts of the biodiversity crisis, society must reach 30% land and water conservation by 2030. The 30 by 30 metric is critical as an interim goal to meet broader land and water protection and climate milestones by 2050.

Illinois has significant strengths to be leveraged to contribute to the national 30 by 30 efforts. Illinois benefits from strong public support for investment in nature, a strong cultural connection to our natural areas, and support for conservation in the political arena. While this plan is centered on land and water protection, the inclusion of nature-based solutions that provide long-term co-benefits to wildlife, communities, and sensitive ecosystems will ensure the biodiversity crisis is not siloed from the climate crisis.

Currently, about 4.2% of Illinois land is permanently conserved by easement or government ownership. That figure nearly doubles when land currently enrolled in government programs, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Conservation Reserve Program and the State of Illinois' Forestry Development Act, is included. The task force heard presentations from state agencies describing current programs to help protect clean air, land, and water while providing additional ecosystem services.

To reach 30%, Illinois would have to conserve an acreage equal to the area of New Jersey, about nine million additional acres. Today, nearly 75% of the state's land area is in row crop agriculture, pasture, hay production, or other agricultural use. Privately owned natural lands, urban and developed areas, roadways and other uses make up the rest. Voluntary conservation practices by private landowners, encouraged by program incentives where possible, must be a significant part of any statewide 30 by 30 conservation strategy.

Information presented during the listening sessions on current statewide conservation efforts, ranging from formal governmental protection through land acquisition to incentives for voluntary private land conservation, suggest an all-of-the-above approach, significantly scaled up, would be necessary to achieve any statewide 30 by 30 goals.

The work of the 30 by 30 Conservation Task Force represented a high-level exploration of how the 30 by 30 initiative might be implemented in Illinois. Through a series of five 90-minute public meetings, the task force created a snapshot of the status of land and water conservation in Illinois, explored limitations and opportunities for a 30 by 30 initiative in Illinois, and solicited the opinions of organizations and the public on the topic. This report contains recommended strategies for moving forward, but it is not a detailed road map.

Specific recommendations include supporting and funding increased conservation capacity by public and private organizations, improving coordination and collaboration by conservation organizations, removing barriers to conservation, and encouraging more innovative conservation programs. A statewide framework for achieving 30 by 30 in Illinois and a possible leadership structure is also proposed.

A recommended next step would be to task a leadership group with creating a statewide implementation framework for achieving 30 by 30 in Illinois, possibly modeled off the Chicago Wilderness Green Vision, that would include a more focused examination of the recommendations in this report, solicit public opinion, and develop a plan of action. In addition, such a plan should consider what actions count toward the 30 by 30 goals; foster equity, inclusion, and accessibility; and align with existing conservation plans in Illinois

Illinois will have to consider a variety of non-traditional land conservation strategies beyond formal protection to achieve 30 by 30 goals. It will require strong partnerships across all sectors of Illinois society. The state also will need to ramp up existing conservation programs, including incentivizing landowners, providing more technical assistance, and continuing to acquire sensitive and high-quality natural areas from willing sellers.

I: Introduction

Student Call to Action

We are in the middle of the sixth mass extinction, and the first to be caused by humans. About 150 species go extinct every day, nearly 1,000 times the rate it would be if not for humans invading every stretch of our planet.

With only three percent of our state's land and water conserved, more than 54,000 species are at risk. We have a long way to go. Humans created this issue and humans have the power to reverse it.

What we do know is that this is Illinois' last chance to jump on the global 30 by 30 initiative and make a significant positive impact. We have the opportunity to lead the way to protect our country's natural gifts for the future.

Collaboration has to be at the core of everything we do. Each of you are here because your voice and perspective are valuable. It is easy to point fingers and place blame, but we want to avoid seeing our obstacles as enemies because what we are facing is not one person or group but 100 years of apathy towards our planet.

With these words, the student 30 by 30 Conservation Task Force members from Pontiac Township High School set the stage for the work of the task force itself. Created through legislation passed by the Illinois General Assembly and signed into law by Governor JB Pritzker in 2021 ([Public Act 102-0618](#)), the Illinois 30 by 30 Conservation Task Force was directed to explore the application of this global conservation concept to Illinois. How can Illinois contribute to the goal of conserving 30% of the planet's land surface area by the year 2030?

II. Task Force Structure, Directives and Process

Website

The Task Force consisted of 23 members drawn from Illinois state government agencies, members of the Illinois General Assembly, environmental and agricultural organizations, environmental science teachers and students, higher education academicians, and outdoor sports (*Appendix I*). It was chaired and supported by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

Guided by the legislative finding that Illinois must establish a bold goal to protect 30% of the state's land by the year 2030, the task force was required to solicit public input by holding at least three listening sessions to explore the following focus areas:

- Identify the resources currently available and understand how they are being utilized to protect land and water resources.
- Determine what resources and incentives landowners and the private sector can use to restore degraded natural areas and to manage their resources sustainably.
- Identify financial resources from the private sector, philanthropy, and public sources to expand protections and to help manage lands and waters for conservation (defined as the ability of the state to manage more public lands for the benefit of future generations).

- Develop recommendations to conserve and protect 30% of Illinois' land and water by 2030.

The Task Force was further directed to create a report summarizing the findings that would suggest how Illinois might set such a bold goal for conservation and identify strategies it can pursue to reach it.

Task Force Meetings: The Task Force convened an initial organizational meeting that provided an overview of the Illinois 30 by 30 conservation initiative and an overview of the current state of conservation efforts in Illinois. The Task Force decided at this meeting to host three listening sessions organized around three major landscape types in Illinois: agricultural; urban; and rural public and private natural lands, including woodlands, wetlands, and grasslands.

Each listening session began with short presentations that described past and current conservation programs and activities implemented directly by public agencies or through public agency support for private landowners in the three focal landscape types. One of the two urban presentations was made by Chicago Wilderness, an alliance of several hundred public and private organizations that build on the 100-year-old tradition of land conservation in the greater Chicago region. These contextual presentations were then followed by Task Force discussion and oral public comments. Written comments were also accepted at any time and made part of the administrative record.

The Task Force meeting following the last listening session included a discussion of the listening session comments and a proposal for a statewide vision for 30 by 30. Task Force members also discussed strategies for scaling up existing programs to meet 30 by 30 objectives.

The Task Force recognizes that more voices need to be heard as goals, strategies and actions are developed. Indigenous people whose ancestors called Illinois home have a unique and spiritual connection to the land. Their input and perspective will be invaluable to the Task Force. Introductory letters were sent to Indigenous tribal governments prior to listening sessions, but no responses have been received. Due to the compressed time frame of the Task Force listening sessions and report due date, it is the hope of Task Force members that outreach to Indigenous tribes continues as recommendations of this report are developed and discussed. Additionally, Pontiac Township High School students and teacher Paul Ritter have reached out to establish relationships and dialogue with Indigenous youth living in Illinois and the Midwest (*Appendix II*).

III. Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss, and the Origins of 30 by 30

The world is facing the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change, and there is recognition that we need to act now. Both are negatively impacting humanity and the overall fabric of life. Conservation of land and water can mitigate both crises by providing habitat, carbon sequestration, and climate resiliency.

Agreement on this comes from science-driven institutions like the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, as well as from human rights organizations and business-oriented bodies like the World Economic Forum.

Biodiversity loss – the loss of plants and animals through extinction – is primarily due to loss of habitat which people continue to convert to other uses. These losses can be felt on a local and a global scale, where species may become rare or disappear altogether even if they may persist elsewhere.

Globally, the evolution of new species and extinction of existing species has been a continuous process throughout the history of life on Earth. However, due to habitat loss and changing land uses, the current global extinction rate is estimated to be 1,000 times the historic background level. Land use changes mean there is less land available to support a diversity of plant and animal life. To bring this process back into balance, people will need to protect and conserve more natural land and find ways for lands converted to human use to support additional biodiversity.

The climate change crisis is due to increased greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide (CO₂) produced by the burning of fossil fuels, that trap heat in the atmosphere. This extra CO₂ and heat fuels average temperature increases, makes oceans more acidic, creates more frequent and prolonged droughts and floods, and results in other climate cycle instabilities. Climate change creates its own extinction threat as ecosystems change faster than species can adapt. It also presents major threats to human health and welfare, as impoverished populations around the world are less likely to have the financial resources required to offset negative consequences.

There are two important approaches to reduce the growing concentration of atmospheric greenhouse gases. The most urgent approach is to reduce and eventually eliminate carbon emissions that result from the burning of fossil fuels. The second is to increase the amount of carbon pulled out of the atmosphere and sequester it. The most immediately available and least costly method for doing this is through natural removal of CO₂ by plants and storage in vegetation and soils. One school of scientific thought is that there is no pathway to mitigating climate change without efforts to protect and restore nature to expand upon natural carbon sequestration.

30 by 30 Global Origins

In consideration of the need to address these interrelated crises, a science-based policy proposal called the Global Deal for Nature (GDN) was proposed in 2019 to address both planetary emergencies with one strategy. The need for global protection of a minimum of 30% and up to 70%, or even higher, of the land and sea on Earth is well supported in the literature. The call for 50% of the Earth is a mid-point of these values and is supported by a range of studies. Thus, the GDN calls for maintaining and restoring half of the planet's lands and waters by 2050. Conserving 30% of Earth's natural lands and waters by 2030 is proposed as a milestone toward the larger end goal.

An international coalition of more than 90 countries, including the United States, has pledged to the goal of conserving a minimum of 30% of the planet's land and water by 2030.

National Initiative

President Joe Biden signed an executive order in January 2021 that led to the launch of the “Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful” 30 by 30 initiative in May 2021. The report laid out eight principles governing America's 30 by 30 approach. These include the importance of locally

led and designed conservation; benefits to all people; job creation; respect for private property rights and the contributions of private property owners; and science as a foundation. More recently, the “America the Beautiful Challenge” was announced, making more than \$1 billion available for projects to implement this plan.¹

State of Illinois Legislative Efforts

The national initiative was stepped down to the State of Illinois when students at Pontiac Township High School reached out to their state elected officials and drafted legislative language proposing an Illinois 30 by 30 Conservation Task Force.² This legislation was introduced in 2021, passed unanimously by the General Assembly, and signed into law by Governor JB Pritzker.

Defining Lands and Waters Contributing to 30 by 30

The GDN uses the words “protection,” “reserves,” and “conservation” in various contexts when discussing the 30 by 30 initiative, but clearly anticipates that lands and waters included in the 30 by 30 calculus will have legal or other protections for effective long-term conservation of nature. The GDN also recognizes that biodiversity is not uniformly distributed around the planet, that some areas will contribute to the global 30 by 30 protection goal more than others, and that all areas can contribute through inclusion of additional sustainable use targets that partially address the biodiversity and climate change objectives.

The Task Force discussed the application of this concept to Illinois and considered how agriculture is a predominate land use in the state (75% of the state’s land area), which practically precludes achieving the 30 by 30 goals exclusively through formal protection. Task Force members agreed to consider conservation practices and sustainable uses private landowners adopt voluntarily, either through their own resources or with the support of government incentive programs, in conjunction with formal protection as part of the Illinois strategy.

IV. Current State of Land and Water Conservation in Illinois

Land Use in Illinois

Current Land Cover Distribution

- Most land in Illinois is used for agriculture.³
- Most land in Illinois is privately owned.⁴

National Land Cover Comparison

- Illinois is much more agricultural than most of the United States, significantly less forested, and modestly more urban.

¹ WH Press Release

² Task Force Bill

³ Environmental Research Service

⁴ 1990 Census

Historic Land Cover Trends

- Since 1800, Illinois land has been converted from primarily natural prairie and forests to farmland, infrastructure, or urban areas.⁵

For purposes of 30 by 30, land and water conservation can be roughly divided into two categories: 1) permanent dedicated protection through fee simple and easement acquisition, and 2) voluntary conservation practices by private landowners accomplished solely by the landowner or through government incentives.

Lands and waters under permanent, dedicated protection – such as parks, fish and wildlife areas, refuges, nature preserves – are mapped and recorded, and accurate acreages are available. Similarly, privately owned lands and waters that are enrolled in government-sponsored conservation programs are well documented, and total land and water areas can be calculated. This report does not account for privately owned lands and waters that have been informally set aside by the landowner for their own conservation purposes.

Currently, 4.2% of the total land area in Illinois is formally protected for conservation purposes through public and private mechanisms. Dedicated nature preserves are considered to provide the highest level of protection. They can be either publicly or privately owned and are protected in perpetuity.

Regionally, the highest percentage of land area formally protected is in the northeast region of the state (12%), where most land acquisition for conservation is done by county forest preserve and conservation districts, federal natural resource agencies, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Highly agricultural east-central Illinois is at less than 2% protected. Of the statewide total of 1.5 million protected acres, only about 27,000 acres (.07%) have been formally protected in the last five years. Clearly, the pace and scale of fee simple and easement acquisitions alone are not enough to satisfy the protection-based goals of 30 by 30, which would require an additional area the size of New Jersey (9 million acres) to come under formal protection.

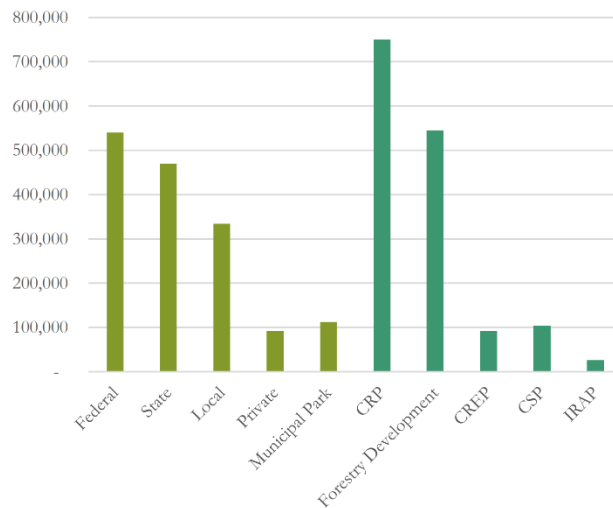
Adding natural lands to the statewide protected lands portfolio is important, but to scale up efforts in this highly modified Illinois landscape we must also look to other land conservation mechanisms and practices, particularly those adopted voluntarily by private landowners. The reality is that most lands that provide conservation benefit in Illinois are not publicly owned or protected in perpetuity.

Many of these private landowners receive incentives through state and federal programs, meaning landowners are paid a stipend to defray the cost of the conservation practices implemented. These lands are worthy of consideration when looking for large acreages in Illinois that provide ecosystem services and advance the climate change and habitat goals of 30 by 30. With some programs and practices overlapping, an estimate without some duplications is difficult to derive. However, acreage enrolled in some of the larger, more common programs provides a general sense of the contribution these lands can have on large scale conservation efforts.

⁵ [USFS Report](#)

Expanding the Umbrella

- Areas do not have to be legally protected in order to provide a conservation benefit.
- The Conservation Reserve Program and Forestry Development Programs both partner with private landowners to ensure conservation practices on their land.
- These two programs alone include roughly **as much land as all formal protection combined.**
- Different programs contribute to goals like biodiversity and climate mitigation in different ways



*CRP - Conservation Reserve Program, CREP - Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, CSP - Conservation Stewardship Program, IRAP - Illinois Recreational Access Program

The green bars on the left in the graph above represent lands in formal permanent protection. The teal bars on the right side of the graph represent lands enrolled in voluntary incentive-based conservation programs and practices. These show a few of the larger programs designed to promote conservation management on lands that are not permanently protected for conservation purposes. For comparison, the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Forestry Development Act (FDA) programs total about as much land as all other protected lands combined. These lands are protected only for the life of the agreement dependent on compliance with program rules.

These conservation agreements are not equivalent to legally protected parks and wildlife areas, but they still need to be considered in a full accounting of conservation. Since these lands are not protected long term for conservation, they cannot be viewed through the same lens as those protected in perpetuity. They will need to be accounted for programmatically over time to ensure they continue to contribute consistently to the total land conservation effort. Some examples highlighted through the listening sessions and from Task Force members include:

- During the past 10 years, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources has acquired about 20,000 acres in fee simple acquisitions. However, the Illinois Recreational Access Program (IRAP) has engaged more lands (by acreage) with far less public funding required. And while IRAP assists landowners with habitat management, the overall management of the property remains with the landowner. Acres come into the program, and some may leave the program when agreements expire. Regardless, the success of programs such as IRAP should inform strategies going forward.
- The Forestry Development Act provides a reduced property tax rate to private forest owners that enter into agreements to manage their timber through timber stand improvement, control of exotic species, or wildlife habitat development. This program is delivered by IDNR's Division of Forestry and is limited only by the number of interested landowners and

the number of district foresters that work with landowners on the program sign-up and management plans. Enrolled properties are concentrated in northwest, west, and southern portions of the state where the most forested land occurs.

- The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) is a conservation program administered by the U.S. Forest Service in partnership with state agencies to encourage the protection of privately owned forest lands through conservation easements or land purchases. Protection of private forests through FLP maintains a multitude of public benefits including recreation, wildlife habitat, and timber products. Currently, there are three areas of eligibility in Illinois and eight properties enrolled.
- The Illinois Nature Preserves Commission has two programs that offer the highest level of legal protection for natural land in Illinois – the Dedicated Nature Preserve and the Registered Land and Water Reserve. Both offer permanent protection and management assistance to maintain the natural ecological conditions of the site. These programs primarily focus efforts on the highest quality natural communities remaining in the state. This is accomplished by seeking formal protection of Illinois Natural Area Inventory (INAI) sites. The INAI is a systematic, comprehensive statewide inventory of high-quality natural areas, currently totaling more than 1,500 sites.
- Partners for Conservation and Fall Covers for Spring Savings are two programs administered by the Illinois Department of Agriculture that support conservation practices on agricultural lands. Partners for Conservation provides cost-sharing assistance for a variety of conservation, nutrient, and sediment management practices. Fall Covers provides a crop insurance discount for farmers who plant cover crops. During the past three years, requests for participation have been twice the available funding but still resulted in 150,000 acres put under cover crop management. Considering two-thirds of Illinois is in row crop production, the potential for carbon storage and water quality benefits is significant through these programs if they can be scaled up.

There are large federal agricultural programs that provide similar conservation benefits. These include U.S. Department of Agriculture programs such as Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and Regional Conservation Partnership Program. More than 1.5 million acres are currently under contract for these three programs in Illinois, with an additional 100,000 acres in agricultural conservation easements.

V: Comments and Recommendations from the Task Force and the Public

The remainder of the report body summarizes comments and recommendations, organized thematically, and linked to the document or comment.

Modes of Conservation

Permanent Protection

- Publicly owned lands and waters for habitat or recreation⁶
- Conservation land trust owned lands and waters⁷
- Privately owned lands under easements

Conservation Practices

- Voluntary temporary protection programs, like CRP and IRAP⁸
- Technical and financial assistance programs, like Partners for Fish and Wildlife⁹
- Certification programs like Conservation at Home¹⁰
- Natural lands and waters, outside of any program¹¹

Additional Programs and Protections

- Regulatory programs¹²
- Agricultural incentive programs like Fall Covers for Spring Savings¹³ at the state level; also USDA agricultural programs including Environmental Quality Incentives Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and Regional Conservation Partnership Program
- Voluntary programs like the Pollinator-Friendly Solar Site designation¹⁴

Measuring of Conserved Areas

Measuring Conserved Land Amounts¹⁵

- Overall acreage percentages
- Breakdown by geographic area
- Discussion of access to conserved lands

Measuring Conserved Land Contributions¹⁶

- Measuring contributions to biodiversity
- Measuring contributions to climate change mitigation

⁶ [DNR Presentation – Natural Lands and Waters](#)

⁷ [DNR Presentation – Launch Meeting](#)

⁸ [CREP Presentation](#), [DNR Presentation – Natural Lands and Waters](#)

⁹ [PFW Presentation](#)

¹⁰ [Chicago Living Corridors](#)

¹¹ [TF Member - Austin Omer](#)

¹² [IEPA Presentation](#)

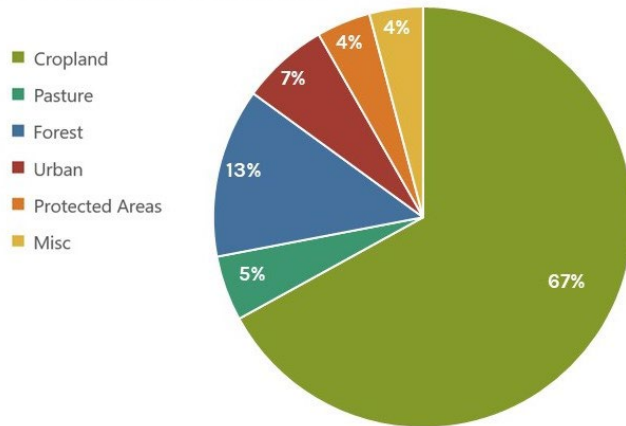
¹³ [IEPA Presentation](#), [IDoA Presentation](#)

¹⁴ [DNR Presentation – Launch Meeting](#)

¹⁵ Based on data acquired from public agencies/I-View

¹⁶ Based on existing reports from public agencies/University of Illinois

Where to seek conservation value and ecosystem services



Strategies and Recommendations

The strategies and recommendations below emerged from the listening sessions and comments received through the website. A framework for how these might be considered and synthesized into an action plan is presented in the final section of this report.

Build Conservation Capacity

Increase conservation agency staffing

- Increase long-term funding for state and local conservation agencies to national standards¹⁷
- Prioritize hiring new site staff to properly manage existing public lands and waters
- Hire new administrative and program staff necessary to manage expanded voluntary incentive programs
- Explore developing conservation workforce programs modeled on the Conservation Corps¹⁸

Increase voluntary conservation program funding

- Increase overall funding levels of voluntary conservation programs to incentivize protection of high-value lands¹⁹
- Secure stable funding sources for programs to insulate from budget shocks²⁰
- Increase funding levels for agricultural incentive programs, considering 75% of Illinois is in agricultural land uses

¹⁷ [PRN](#), [PSCC](#), [NLI](#)

¹⁸ [CW](#)

¹⁹ [AFT](#), [US PIRG](#), [PSCC](#), [CW](#)

²⁰ [TF Member – Jason Bleich](#)

Manage existing conservation areas strategically

- Explore how to adjust management of public conservation areas to increase natural habitat, carbon sequestration, and climate resiliency²¹
- Explore targeted dedications of public conservation areas to add additional protections²²

Acquire new conservation areas strategically

- Increase funding for land acquisitions through the Real Estate Transfer Tax²³
- Prioritize land acquisitions to promote increase habitat connectivity, carbon sequestration, climate resiliency, and open space access²⁴

Improve Coordination and Collaboration

Increase awareness of conservation program benefits

- Promote the benefits of sustainable agricultural practices on costs and productivity²⁵
- Promote the social, health, and economic benefits of urban forestry and green space²⁶
- Connect residents to nearby outdoor opportunities

Disseminate and encourage best practices for private landowner conservation

- Consolidate best practices for private landowner habitat management in a central location²⁷
- Expand private habitat registration programs statewide²⁸

Improve coordination between public and private conservation efforts

- Create a statewide conservation coordination body to share improve inter-organization cooperation, share best practices, and strengthen advocacy efforts²⁹
- Develop partnerships with state agencies, local governments, and private organizations to support the goals of 30 by 30³⁰
- Create a statewide inventory of all conservation programs³¹
- Share information in the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory with nonprofit and local partners³²

²¹ [PRN, Friends of Bell Smith Prairie](#)

²² Internal suggestion

²³ [PSCC, PRN, NLI](#)

²⁴ [PRN](#) (implied by others)

²⁵ [TF Member – Matt Montgomery, Pontiac students](#)

²⁶ [DNR Presentation – Urban Forestry, TF Member – Todd Katz, Paul Ritter](#)

²⁷ [Naperville Park District](#)

²⁸ [Openlands, Chat Comments](#)

²⁹ [TF Discussion – Cities and Towns](#)

³⁰ [TF Discussion – Cities and Towns, CW](#)

³¹ [TF Member – Paul Ritter](#)

³² [PSCC](#)

Align programs with local priorities and values

- Provide opportunities for local communities to provide feedback on current programs³³
- Actively engage local communities in preparation for new programs and open spaces

Remove Barriers to Conservation

Reduce regulatory barriers to conservation

- Allow denser urban land use to reduce the need for greenfield development³⁴
- Remove regulations and homeowner association rules barring native plants on lawns to allow native lawns³⁵
- Amend federal regulations barring stacking of benefits on conservation lands³⁶

Improve conservation funding accessibility

- Provide technical assistance to disadvantaged communities with applying for and implementing grant projects³⁷
- Reduce grant matching requirements for disadvantaged communities

Reduce risk for conservation program participation

- Ensure private individuals are not left with undue costs if public programs lose support³⁸

Increase opportunities for conservation land trusts to contribute

- Make additional sources of conservation funding available to conservation land trusts³⁹

Encourage Innovative Programs

Develop new programs to address current gaps in conservation strategy

- Explore new programs to improve integrated floodplain management⁴⁰
- Explore new programs to convert turf to native plants in communities and along the right of way⁴¹
- Explore new programs to increase adoption of regenerative agricultural practices⁴²
- Explore new programs to decrease greenfield development of natural and agricultural areas, such as agricultural conservation easements⁴³
- Explore changes to environmental consultation and review processes⁴⁴

³³ [IEC](#)

³⁴ Internal suggestion, in response to many comments asking for policies to curb the expansion of urban/suburban sprawl, including [Stacy Bowman](#), [AFT](#), [Chat Comments](#)

³⁵ [CW](#), [Chat Comments](#)

³⁶ [TF Discussion – Review Meeting](#)

³⁷ Internal suggestions, currently being done by IDNR

³⁸ [Chat Comments](#)

³⁹ [PSCC](#)

⁴⁰ [American Rivers](#)

⁴¹ [CW](#), [UIC](#), [Chat Comments](#)

⁴² [Liberty Prairie Foundation](#), [Louis Nelms](#)

⁴³ [Stacy Bowman](#), [The Conservation Fund \(coalition\)](#), [PSCC](#), [AFT](#)

⁴⁴ [PSCC](#), [PRN](#)

A Statewide Vision for Conservation

Most land in Illinois, and essentially all waters, are impacted by or directed toward human use. Even protected areas, which make up a tiny fraction of the landscape, are managed by people to meet human priorities. Our footprint is enormous, but climate change and the associated biodiversity loss threaten human well-being and eventually our very existence. What can change is how we reconcile ourselves with the natural world that we all share, even as we abate the most serious consequences of these twin threats. This can start with a statewide vision for conservation

A vision for the Illinois landscape was drafted based on commonly expressed values presented during the listening sessions. A shared vision is necessary to develop collective goals and recommendations so that we are motivated to action, assess our progress, and celebrate our successes.

We envision an Illinois:

- where the landscape maintains native species, is resilient to climate change, and provides equitable access to nature's benefits to all residents;
- where people in Illinois live and work in safe and healthy communities with vibrant economies, have equitable local access to open spaces, and live in a sustainable relationship with nature; and
- where private landowners regularly adopt voluntary conservation measures that sustain Illinois' native plant and animal communities, mitigate climate change, and support recreational and economic activities throughout the state.

Developing Statewide Framework for Achieving 30 by 30

Comprehensive and Holistic Approach Modeled from the Chicago Wilderness Green Vision

The Chicago Wilderness partnership clearly articulated the need for a comprehensive and holistic approach based on their Green Vision for the Chicago Metropolitan Area. The need for such an approach across the highly modified landscapes of Illinois – the majority of which are working landscapes – was suggested through the various presentations and reinforced by other commentors.

The capacity to achieve the goals of 30 by 30 will come not just from traditional conservation lands and waters, but from activating every land use type – agricultural, residential, and corporate – to contribute to overall health for nature and for people. All land types have crucial and complementary roles to play in sustaining healthy ecosystems.

For example, significant 30 by 30 acreage could come through voluntary regenerative practices on working agricultural lands. In urban areas, green infrastructure that includes greenway corridors, residential backyards, corporate campuses, rights of way, revitalized brownfields, and green roofs could all contribute to the goals of 30 by 30.

Adding lands to formal conservation holdings would have to focus on those lands offering the highest gains for biodiversity such as securing protections for all remaining lands on the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory along with other high-quality preserves. Of primary importance also will be protecting critical lands and waters identified in watershed plans; expanding and connecting existing conservation holdings; protecting remnant oak ecosystems; and protecting large sites with remnant natural communities.

Defining goals, standards, and metrics; establishing baseline conditions; and tracking progress are all central elements of the proposed Chicago Wilderness framework. A central interactive platform would be necessary to manage the entire project as a statewide enterprise.

What Counts?

About 96% of Illinois' land area is under private ownership, and 75% is under some form of agricultural land use. It is not realistic or reasonable to suggest that 30% of the state should be put under permanent protection and restored to perennial native plant communities, nor is this anticipated under the global framework.

The Global Deal for Nature acknowledges that biodiversity is not uniformly represented across the planet and that biodiversity protection (with its attendant carbon storage benefits) should be focused on the most biodiverse regions. But it acknowledges areas under existing intensive human use can be managed differently to better store carbon and enhance biodiversity conservation, and thus support the overall objectives of 30 by 30.

In addition to fully considering traditional formal protection accomplishments and strategies in Illinois, the Task Force listening sessions focused on voluntary actions on private lands as a necessary strategy to contribute to the 30 by 30 goals. The Task Force did not address the questions of what counts under what conditions and in what percentages.

A statewide framework would need to develop a **principled, science-based approach to determining “what counts”** toward 30 by 30. Establishing a standard baseline will require extensive consultations with a variety of stakeholders and should be calibrated to reflect a multifaceted perspective, taking into consideration factors such as parcel size, landscape position, resiliency potential of habitat, and whether said parcel is under long-term or interim protection. It requires such consultations to be informed by cultural considerations and principles of ecology. Further, achieving the goals of 30 by 30 will require innovation that embraces the opportunities to work with diverse landowners to restore and connect habitat, as well as meet challenges like flood risk and climate change.

Foster Equity Throughout Goal Implementation

While much emphasis has been placed on the ecological significance of our lands and waters, the historical and cultural significance of these places cannot be overlooked. Stewardship efforts led by Indigenous peoples should receive formalized safeguards to ensure the continuation of traditional ways of life and rights, including customary hunting, fishing, and gathering practices. Conservation approaches must include attention to diverse perspectives, prioritizing inclusion and environmental

justice. This must be done with special consideration given to communities with most potential for greenspace expansion and the associated economic and job-creation benefits.

Alignment with Existing Plans

In addition to the Chicago Wilderness Green Vision, an **Illinois 30 by 30 strategy should be in alignment with the biodiversity goals of other existing state and local conservation plans**, including but not limited to the State Wildlife Action Plan, [Illinois Forest Action Plan](#), State Water Plan, [State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan](#), and the Forest Preserves of Cook County’s Next Century Conservation Plan. This should be actualized by leveraging all forms of public funding and programs across agencies and levels of government, such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and state land and water conservation programs. Approaches should incorporate accelerated investment in land acquisition, permanent conservation easements, and augmented partnerships with non-governmental and community-based organizations. This must entail creative thinking to explore a wide variety of conservation mechanisms and pathways.

Leadership Structure for Strategy Development

Recommendations from Task Force members included the creation of a coordinating council or working group under the Illinois lieutenant governor’s office to bring together relevant staff from agencies and non-governmental organizations to develop a strategy for implementation of 30 by 30. Non-governmental organization participants would include a cross-section of the conservation community but also a proportionate number of representatives from organizations beyond the realm of conservation to ensure equity goals are met.

The work of this group could solidify Illinois as a leader and model state concerning land protection, climate smart land use decisions, and equitable access in the Midwest.

Appendix I: Task Force Members

Website:

John Rogner, Chair	Assistant Director, Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources
Rep. Thomas Bennett	State Representative
Rep. Robyn Gabel	State Representative
Sen. Jason Barickman	State Senator

Sen. Dave Koehler	State Senator
Brian Rennecker	Bureau Chief of Land and Water, Department of Agriculture
Todd Rettig	Deputy Director, Illinois Environmental Protection Agency
Mike Vanderhoof	Bureau Chief of Planning, Department of Transportation
Lindsay Keeney	Conservation Director, Illinois Environmental Council
Dr. Austin Omer	Associate Director of Natural Resource Policy, Illinois Farm Bureau
Todd Katz	Environmental science teacher
Paul Ritter	Environmental science teacher
Emilie Collins	Environmental science student
Ava Nollen	Environmental science student
Emma O'Lone	Environmental science student
Olivia Schickel	Environmental science student
Jim Herkert	Executive Director, Illinois Audubon
Ellicia Sanchez	External Affairs, The Nature Conservancy
Kyle Rorah	Regional Director of Public Policy, Ducks Unlimited
Dr. George Czapar	Associate Dean and Director Emeritus, University of Illinois Extension

KJ Johnson	President, Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association
Dr. Matt Montgomery	Pioneer Field Agronomist, Corteva Agriscience
Jason Bleich	Private Lands Biologist, USFWS - Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program

Appendix II: Outreach to Indigenous Nations

- Letter of introduction to Indigenous nations



Illinois Department of Natural Resources

One Natural Resources Way Springfield, Illinois 62702-1271
www.dnr.illinois.gov

JB Pritzker, Governor
Colleen Callahan, Director

Dear [title and name],

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself. I am the Assistant Director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and currently serve as the Chair of the Illinois 30 by 30 Conservation Task Force. In connection with the global effort of the same name, the Task Force was created by the Illinois State Legislature last year with the purpose of gathering input on how to improve and expand conservation of land and water in the part of the world now called Illinois.

As part of this work, the Task Force is responsible for pursuing meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities who were forcibly removed from this land and for respecting your priorities for the stewardship of natural and cultural areas. To this end, in addition to general listening sessions already scheduled for March (schedule attached), we would like to hold one or more virtual meetings dedicated exclusively to hearing from representatives of Indigenous nations in April and May of this year.

If you or a representative of your nation would like to speak at any of these meetings, feel free to connect via the links provided or to provide written comments if that is preferred. If dedicated virtual meetings are preferred, please let me know and we can work with you to schedule these later in Spring.

We understand that your time is very valuable and appreciate any input you would like to provide. We are also hopeful that this can be the start of a longer engagement process that will extend after the Task Force concludes in July, as discussions of the 30 by 30 goals continue.

Sincerely,
John Rogner
Assistant Director
Illinois Department of Natural Resources
John.Rogner@Illinois.gov
217-785-0075 (off)
217-836-0010 (cell)

Pontiac Township High School students and teacher Paul Ritter contacted the Odawa Nation, a nation related to but separate from the Ojibwe and Potawatomi Nations. The goal of the conversations was to establish a dialogue between students and to elicit comments from students and elders.

A call was held with the Wisdom Circle of the Odawa Nation headquartered in Traverse City, Michigan, for input on 30 by 30. Chief Pontiac was head of the Ottawa (Odawa) Nation, thus the connection between Pontiac Township High School and the Odawa.

Primary concerns expressed by elders were re-establishing balance between human needs and nature. Elders advocated adopting a holistic approach that includes people as part of the community of living things, with an operating system focused on not taking more than you need from nature. They emphasized young people need to be part of the conversation and the importance of every effort to care for the Earth, such as picking up trash while hiking. Finally, they stressed the importance of not overharvesting timber, fish stocks and other resources, while putting time and resources into restoration of the land and controlling invasive species.

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Appendix IV: 30 by 30 Task Force Introductory Meeting

Follow this link for [meeting agendas, minutes, and recordings](#).

Presentations

Pontiac Students: Call to Action

- Emilie Collins and Keagan Hall, former students at Pontiac Township High School who led the effort to draft and pass the founding legislation for the task force, presented on some efforts they and their fellow students have been involved in.
 - P2D2: an internationally recognized prescription drug disposal program, benefiting both public and environmental health.
 - Operation Endangered Species: a local student-led movement to reintroduce the Alligator Snapping Turtle, which has raised \$150,000 and released 500 turtles since it started in 2011.
 - 30 by 30 Summit: a meeting of 125 students in January 2020 in support of Illinois contributing to the 30 by 30 movement.
 - Peace by Youth: an international effort involving 140 teachers across five countries engaging their students in the 30 by 30 effort.
- Olivia Schickel, Ava Nollen, and Emma O'Lone, current students at Pontiac Township High School, presented a call to action on the environmental crisis.
 - We are in the middle of the sixth mass extinction and the first to be caused by humans. About 150 species go extinct every day, nearly 1,000 times the rate it would be if not for humans invading every stretch of our planet.
 - With only 3% of Illinois' land and water conserved, more than 54,000 species are at risk. We have a long way to go. Humans created this issue and humans have the power to reverse it.
 - What we do know is that this is Illinois' last chance to jump on the global 30 by 30 initiative and make a significant positive impact. We have the opportunity to lead the way to protect our country's natural gifts for the future.
 - Collaboration has to be at the core of everything we do. Each of you are here because your voice and perspective are valuable. It is easy to point fingers and place blame, but we want to avoid seeing our obstacles as enemies because what we are facing is not one person or group but 100 years of apathy towards our planet.

John Rogner: Overview of the Thirty-by-Thirty Conservation Movement

- Chair Rogner provided background information on the 30 by 30 movement globally and in Illinois.
 - The movement began in 2019 with a scientific paper calling for a “Global Deal for Nature.” In response to two global emergencies, biodiversity loss and climate change, the paper called for setting aside 30% of land and water by the year 2030, to provide habitat for species and to mitigate climate change through carbon sequestration and green infrastructure.
 - It notes that there is no evidence saying that 30% is enough, and more may be needed.
 - This 30% need not be evenly distributed across the planet. Some areas are more valuable as species habitat, others for agriculture for human use.
 - In 2021, President Biden issued an executive order adopting 30 by 30 as a goal for the nation, based on eight principles:

- Pursue a collaborative and inclusive approach to conservation
- Conserve America’s lands and waters for the benefit of all people
- Support locally led and locally designed conservation efforts
- Honor tribal sovereignty; support priorities of tribal nations
- Pursue conservation and restoration approaches that create jobs and support healthy communities
- Honor private property rights; support voluntary stewardship efforts of private landowners and fishers
- Use science as a guide
- Build on existing tools and strategies with an emphasis on flexibility and adaptive approaches
- The movement faced pushback in the United States initially from those who feared it would lead to a federal land grab, so the principles sought to make this a collaborative process, working with local governments, tribes, and landowners.
 - The principles also stressed this is about more than just conservation, that the movement should consider how conservation can create jobs and increase access to nature, especially in underserved communities.
- Illinois’ neighbors in the Corn Belt are looking to us to see how 30 by 30 is pursued in a state that is 96% privately owned and three-quarters agriculture.

IDNR Staff: The State of Conservation in Illinois

- Todd Strole, director of the Illinois Nature Preserves, provided background on the current state of land conservation in Illinois and how close the state is to achieving 30 by 30.
 - Overall, two-thirds of land in the state is used for crops, with another 5% in dedicated pasture and some forested land also used for pasture, totaling roughly three-quarters of all land in the state being used for agriculture in some way. Only 4% of the state is currently “protected.”
 - Nationally, 13% of land is protected, and much less is used for cropland.
 - “Protected” in Illinois includes only land that is formally set aside for conservation purposes; it does not include a lot of other land that has conservation value.
 - Currently, 4.2%, or 1.5 million acres, of land in Illinois is protected. To reach 30%, another 9 million acres would have to be added.
 - Only 27,000 acres were added in the past five years.
 - Regionally, the northeast and southern regions of the state have a greater share of protected land due to large public holdings like Shawnee National Forest, while central Illinois is primarily devoted to agriculture.
 - Protected land is largely publicly owned, with half a million acres federally owned alone, and is mostly directly owned rather than protected by easements.
 - Some land is protected as nature preserves, the highest level of protection the state can give.
 - These amounts can overlap if land is protected in different ways.
 - There are also numerous programs that are not “protection” but do provide conservation value, such as the Conservation Reserve Program, Forestry Development Program, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Conservation Stewardship Program, and Illinois Recreational Access Program, which in total actually include more land than all protected areas combined.

- Other programs include Partners for Conservation, Stream Bank Stabilization, and the Solar Pollinator Program

Task Force Discussion

- John Rogner
 - I believe we need to focus on a “conserve” definition over a “protect” definition. Due to the composition of land in Illinois, it will be hard to get anywhere if we do not work with private landowners to improve the conservation value of their land.
- Sen. Koehler
 - That would not require any changes in language.
- Lindsay Keeney
 - I like that we are emphasizing a creative focus here, since there has been some concern from the agricultural community, fears of 30% of land being set aside for conservation and not agriculture.
- Sen. Bennett
 - Hopefully, the broad array of task force members helps, too, ensuring there are many perspectives.

Public Comments (spoken)

Kerry Leigh, Natural Land Institute

- I want to be sure some time is spent in the listening session on discussing barriers. This is an important lens to look at these problems through. For example, how would we fund management of new protected lands? How can we help private landowners overcome barriers to conservation on their lands?

Jim Anderson, Lake County Forest Preserve District

- There is overlap among all of these topics, so I just want to be sure we think about that and don’t keep them too siloed.

Chat Discussion

Sacred Natural Sites

- Abigail Derby Lewis, Field Museum
 - In terms of conservation inclusion, it is worth noting that Sacred Natural Sites (SNSs) are areas of land and water with spiritual significance to peoples and communities and absolutely “count” toward conservation. Formalizing the role of Indigenous partners in this process is critical. Here’s a recent article that may be of interest and possibly a model for how to consider SNS in this 30 by 30 framework. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358211273> Sacred natural sites classification framework based on ecosystem services and implications for conservation

Residential Areas

- Todd Katz
 - If I think about how my neighbors in suburbia could be contributing to conserving 30% of their land, does that look like utilizing their roofs for solar panels? Given that footprint would account for around 30% of their plot?
- Abigail Derby Lewis

- Urban will look really different! I think that is one way, Todd. Plus, replacing lawn with native landscaping. Turns out, urban places can collectively add up to big gains for conservation.
- <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fevo.2019.00220/full>
- Todd Katz
 - That's a great point Abigail. Then just a matter of removing the local laws against having “weeds” and “long grass” in one's yard.
- Jim Anderson
 - Reaching out to organizations across the state who are part of these landscapes. I also think we need to have crosswalks between the landscape groups. I also second Todd Katz that we need to include residents and homeowners and their backyard habitats.
- Abigail Derby Lewis
 - Indeed. Here is one way we've come at the issue in Chicago: a native garden registry <https://news.wttw.com/2021/09/14/native-garden-registry-gets-green-thumbs-city-council>

Written Comments

Lydia Scott, Morton Arboretum

I received the notice from Chicago Wilderness about the 30 by 30 Task Force and I wanted to be sure you were aware of some of the work we have been doing that may help inform your efforts.

First, there is an [Oak Ecosystem Recovery Plan](#) that we developed in 2015. It uses pre-settlement, 1939 and 2010 [maps](#) of remnant oak ecosystems to help us prioritize our work, which would include preservation of oak ecosystems from development and other impacts.

Jennifer Vuitel, East-West Gateway Council of Governments

East-West Gateway has a planning initiative called Ecological Approach to Infrastructure that may be useful to you. To paraphrase our web page (www.ewgateway.org/eco), the Ecological Initiative, as it is also known, focuses on the region's ecologically significant natural resources, while using mapping technology to help better inform transportation planning decisions. The resulting datasets provide environmental data for conservation, mitigation, and restoration, as well as useful information on the location and extent of ecologically significant areas.

We are currently working on new 10-meter land cover and ecological significance data layers for the entire EWG region, which includes Madison, St. Clair, and Monroe counties in Illinois (available this summer). All data is available free of charge. Please take a look and let me know if you have any questions.

There is one caveat, though. Because the ecological significance ratings rely heavily on soil types in addition to land cover data, it is not particularly useful for urban/suburban areas because those soil types are all “disturbed.”

...

Ecological Approach to Infrastructure Development Land Cover and Ecological Significance Data

Purpose

The Ecological Approach to Infrastructure is an ongoing planning effort by East-West Gateway Council of Governments (EWG) to link transportation and development with environmental decision-making. The Ecological Approach focuses on the region's ecologically significant natural resources, while using mapping technology to help better inform planning decisions. Avoiding or minimizing environmental impacts early in the planning process (pre-NEPA) can lead to significant cost reduction and a streamlined environmental review process. Early avoidance can also advance projects while preserving and restoring wildlife habitat, improving water quality, protecting cultural and historical resources, and reducing stormwater and flooding issues.

What it is

The Ecological Approach to Infrastructure data layers highlight areas of ecological significance for the purpose of identifying areas that offer exceptional promise for conservation of viable, functional landscapes through time. In addition, smaller, yet functional patches that support regionally or nationally significant communities or populations of species of conservation concern and deserve special consideration as ecologically significant areas, are also addressed.

Coverage

The land cover and ecological significance layers were created for the eight-county EWG planning region surrounding St. Louis in Missouri and Illinois. This includes the Illinois counties of Madison, Monroe, and St. Clair, and the Missouri counties of Franklin, Jefferson, St. Charles, and St. Louis, and the City of St. Louis. Additionally, there are restoration and preservation ranking layers for the Lower Meramec River in Missouri and Lower Silver Creek in Illinois. There is also a one-meter resolution land cover data layer covering urbanized areas in the EWG region.

Cost

FREE. Initial data gathering, conceptualization of methods, and technical work was completed by Missouri Resource Assessment (MoRAP) and EWG staff and paid for by funding from the Missouri and Illinois Departments of Transportation.

Explanation of the Ecological Significance Ranking

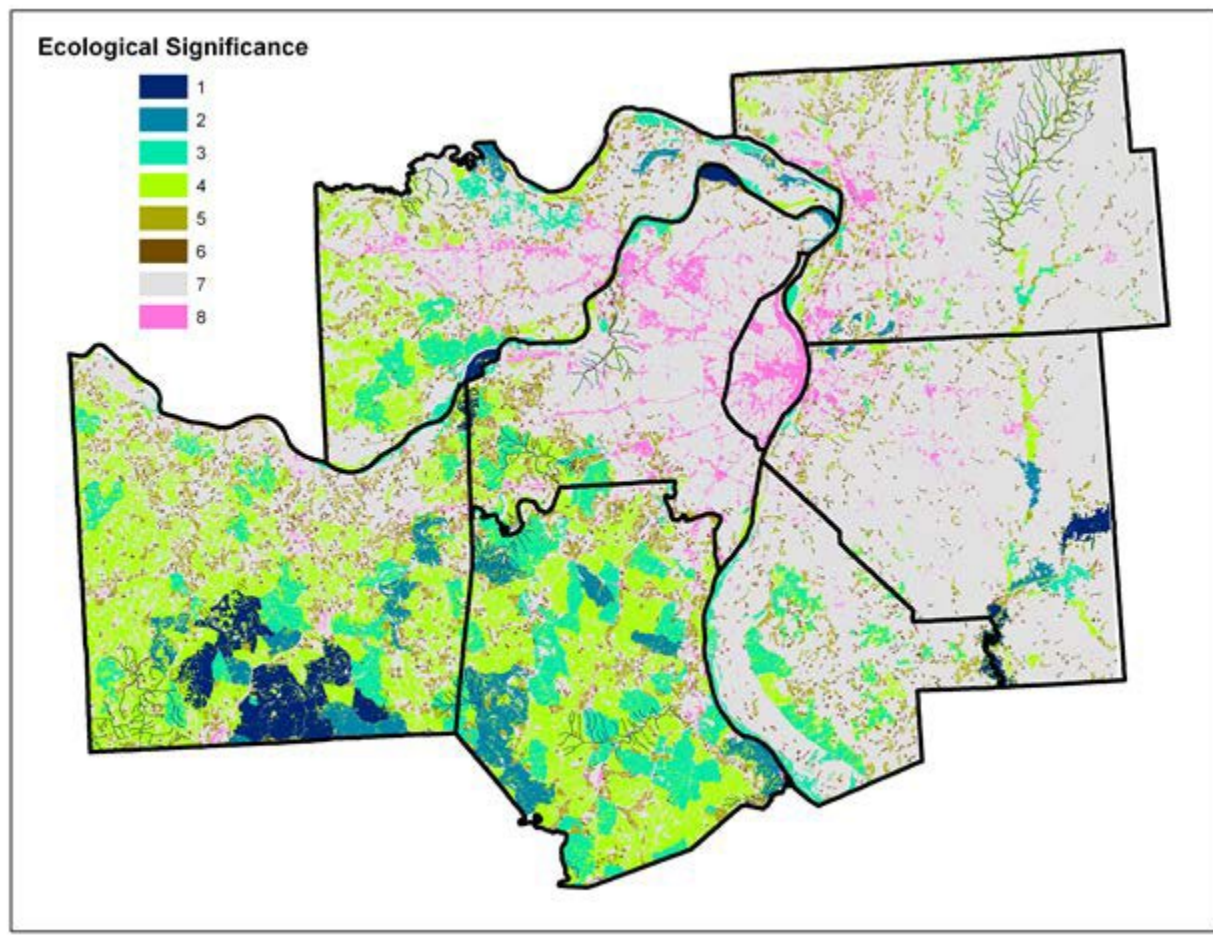
The ecological significance layer is determined through rankings. Significance was assigned to land cover patches based on values for attributes such as size, area of significant natural communities, and number of rare species occurrences. From there, land patches were ranked in tiers.

- Tier 1: Maximum Significance. Only 2.9% of the region is ranked Tier 1. This selection set consists of 50-meter buffers on either side of the center line of streams within watersheds identified as aquatic conservation opportunity areas in Missouri or biological significant streams in Illinois. The focus for Tier 1 is on riverine communities of conservation significance, and coarse-filter elements of natural diversity (e.g., large patches and large areas of significant natural communities).
- Tier 2: Very High Significance. This selection includes patches constituting 2.7% of the region. The focus for Tier 2 is both on coarse-filter (large patches, area of significant natural communities) and fine-filter (globally rare species) elements of natural diversity.

- Tier 3: High Significance. This tier comprises 7.1% of the region and incorporates a variety of coarse-filter and fine-filter targets, as well as the area of public lands, which relates to maintenance of long-term ecosystem functionality.
- Tier 4: Medium Significance. About 14.7% of the region is Tier 4, which includes all remaining natural and semi-natural patches greater than 100 hectares, and all cultural and successional vegetation types that are immediately adjacent to Tier 1, 2, or 3 patches. Emphasis is on overall ecosystem functionality based on patch size.
- Tier 5: Medium Low Significance. This tier is about 4.1% of the region and consists of all remaining natural and semi-natural patches between 20 hectares and 100 hectares. It also emphasizes functionality. These patches may require additions or active management to remain viable over time.
- Tiers 6, 7, and 8 are of Low Significance, Very Low Significance, and Minimum Significance respectively. Together, they make up 68.5% of the region and include the smallest patches of natural and semi-natural land, cropland, and areas of urban high intensity.

Depiction of the Ranking

The image below from the Ecological Approach to Infrastructure report highlights the few remaining areas in the region that comprise the top three tier levels of ecological significance.



How to get it

The Ecological Approach to Infrastructure Development Report and all available data layers can be found at www.ewgateway.org/eco. For questions regarding the data, email gisservices@ewgateway.org. A new, higher resolution data layer (10 meter) and accompanying ecological significance ranking layer for the entire EWG region will be available in fall 2022.

Appendix V: Agricultural Areas Listening Session

Presentations

Brian Rennecker: Illinois Department of Agriculture Conservation Programs

- Brian Rennecker, bureau chief of Land and Water, presented on the Illinois Department of Agriculture's programs for promoting conservation practices on agricultural land.
 - Vision: To promote and regulate agriculture in a manner which encourages farming and agribusiness while protecting Illinois consumers and natural resources.
 - Belief: Agricultural sustainability rests on the principle that we must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
 - Partners for Conservation
 - In partnership with Soil and Water Conservation Districts, the Department of Agriculture runs a cost-share program for the implementation of conservation tillage and cover crops to improve soil health, slow erosion, enhance water infiltration, smother weeds, control pests and disease, and increase biodiversity.
 - Had \$2.9 million and \$2.4 million in allocations statewide in 2019 and 2020, respectively.
 - Covered 56% of adoption costs, with remaining balance paid by landowners.
 - Practices included terraces, grass, waterways, water and sediment control basins, grade stabilization structures, crop residue management, cover crops, nutrient management plans.
 - Of 1,925 projects in 2019-2020, the most common practice was cover crops.
 - Soil erosion was maintained or reduced at or below tolerable levels at 60,283 acres.
 - Indicated 20,006 tons of sediment did not reach Illinois waterways.
 - And reduced nutrient loading.
 - 21,535 pounds of nitrate-nitrogen and 10,170 pounds of phosphorus diverted from loss.
 - Fall Covers for Spring Savings
 - A new program for us, just in the third application cycle.
 - Provides a \$5 per acre discount on crop insurance for lands not enrolled in another federal or state program on a first-come, first-serve basis during enrollment period.
 - Each year have an abundance of applications:
 - **2019:** 50,000-acre program filled in 10 days
 - 113,000 total acres requested

- **2020:** 50,000-acre program filled in 10 hours
 - 185,050 total acres requested
 - **2021:** 100,000-acre program filled in nine hours
 - 172,652 total acres requested
- This highlights that sustained effort from the agricultural sector has made a key impact on nutrient loss reduction.
 - But it is still critical to keep an eye on nutrient levels leaving the state to determine if current strategies are enough to reach reduction goals.

Todd Rettig: IEPA Conservation Programs

- Todd Rettig, deputy director, presented on Illinois Environmental Protection Agency programs impacting conservation in agricultural areas.
 - How our practices differ from other programs:
 - Focus is not on owning real property, and in fact own none, but instead focus on ecosystem services through regulation and funding.
 - 319 Program (Nonpoint Source Management Program)
 - Funding from USEPA, through IEPA.
 - Similar to issues discussed previously, this deals with contaminants washed into rivers, lakes, and streams by runoff and rainfall.
 - Provides technical or financial assistance for a variety of projects.
 - Has reduced flow of chemicals into waterways by:
 - 1,113,495 pounds total nitrogen
 - 499,620 pounds total phosphorus
 - 5,592,051 pounds total suspended solids
 - 634,069 tons sediments
 - Other benefits include:
 - Local watershed-based planning
 - In-field and edge-of-field agriculture conservation practices
 - Streambank and shoreline protection
 - Wetland creation and restoration
 - Livestock and pasture management
 - Tree planting and woodland improvement
 - Ponds and detention basins
 - Urban green infrastructure practices
 - There are other similar programs:
 - Other programs provide funding and expertise for similar kinds of ecosystem service conservation projects, not just at IEPA but at other state and federal agencies as well.
 - 319 Examples:
 - Copperas Creek Watershed Project
 - Developed locally lead watershed-based plan for Copperas Creek.
 - Installed streambank stabilization and agricultural best management practices (BMPs) in the Copperas Creek watershed, a tributary of the Mississippi River. BMPs implemented included about 2,450 feet of streambank stabilization, two acres of filter strips; three grade

stabilization structures; 3.4 acres of grassed waterways; and 1,365 feet of water and sediment control basins.

- Otter Lake Watershed Plan and TMDL Implementation
 - Updated the existing watershed-based plan for the Otter Lake and implemented BMPs to reduce nonpoint source pollution in the Otter Lake watershed. BMPs included 2,413 linear feet of shoreline stabilization, 100 acres of cover crops (50 acres/year for two years), one water and sediment control basin, three ponds, one sediment basin, and wetland restoration.
- Raingarden/Bioswales at Tower Lakes
 - Installed 4,971 square foot bioswale (rain garden), restored 0.4 acres of wetland to further absorb and treat the water coming out of the bioswale, and a 7,798 square foot bioswale (rain garden). Construction of the bioswales included excavation, engineered topsoil, and native vegetation.
- Overall, it would be difficult to conserve the required number of acres for 30 by 30 through public ownership, but these programs can protect and preserve ecosystem services to the same ends of healthier ecosystems, better habitat, and improved biodiversity.
 - One of the eight principles was building on existing strategies with an emphasis on flexibility. These kinds of programs can fit into that principle.

IDNR Staff: Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)

- Michelle Bloomquist, CREP manager, presented on the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program.
 - Goals
 - To improve water quality and fish and wildlife habitat.
 - Takes frequently flooded, environmentally sensitive crop land and puts it into conservation easements.
 - It is a partnership program with the Farm Service Agency and other government and nongovernment organizations.
 - Eligibility
 - Areas in the Illinois River and Kaskaskia River watersheds are eligible.
 - There is more enrollment in the Illinois River area, because enrollment there was open from 1998-2015, while the Kaskaskia River was only open from 2010-2015.
 - On the state side, there are 33,500 easements protecting 90,000 acres.
 - 232,000 acres is the federal cap, so there is plenty of space for more.
 - Federal side
 - CREP is a sub-program of CRP, which is managed by the Farm Service Agency. CREP sub-program offers a 15-year contract to landowners with a higher cost-share rate (50%) for putting their land into conservation.
 - State side
 - We at IDNR extend and enhance that CREP contract when it has expired, offering an easement for 15 years, 30 years, or perpetually.
 - Although this may change when the program reopens this year.

- We also enhance the contract by adding additional, contiguous acres, creating corridors of conservation.
 - The payment is a one-time, lump-sum payment when the easement is executed.
 - And we pay the other 50% of the cost-share, so landowner is made whole for conservation practices.
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
 - Are another great partner. They perform enrollment, conduct monitoring, assist with managing existing easements, and are local contact for CREP landowners.
- CREP easements
 - A legal agreement restricting the use of land that stays with the property even if it is sold.
 - The landowner still retains all recreation rights but restricts agriculture and construction.
 - No public access is required, but it is allowed.
 - IDNR also helps advise landowners to manage property as best they can.

IDNR Staff: Agricultural Lease Program

- Bob Caveny, farm program manager, presented on IDNR's agricultural lease program.
 - IDNR has 475,000 acres owned, another 450,000 managed (mostly leased from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers).
 - 35,000 acres of that is leased mostly for row crop agriculture.
 - A small amount is pasture or soon-expiring CRP contracts.
 - Income supports management of state sites.
 - Work with 240 tenants across the state.
 - The leases developed under this program will promote ecologically sound agricultural practices to improve soil health, minimize soil erosion, improve water quality, and reduce chemical use.
 - IDNR recognizes its responsibility to be a leader in conservation agriculture and strives to develop an agricultural lease program to be used as models for producers throughout the state.
 - Income generated from agricultural leases supports enhancement or establishment of wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.
 - IDNR develops crop plans with site staff and local biologists.
 - As part of this, IDNR is implementing cover crops on most of our leases.
 - Received Regional Conservation Partners Program (NRCS) funding for reduced tillage, crop rotation.
 - Targeting 8,000 acres for that, getting tenants enrolled at NRCS offices across the state to learn what works best for farmers in different areas.
 - Evaluating cover crop mixes to see their effect on soil health and wildlife health, with University of Illinois researchers.
 - IDNR adopts numerous policies to protect natural communities.
 - No neonicotinoid treated soybeans are allowed on IDNR sites.
 - Neonicotinoid pesticides are used as a seed coating to prevent pest damage to plants, but which can harm non-target invertebrates.

- No foliar application of neonicotinoids or Dicamba allowed on IDNR sites.
- No fall tillage (without written permission) or fall nitrogen applications.
- Vertical tillage allowed to incorporate some of the residue or cover crop seed.
 - Tillage can loosen the soil to allow roots to penetrate more deeply. However, tillage also can contribute to moisture loss and allow wind and water erosion.
- IDNR is collecting soil samples to monitor soil health.
 - Working with University of Illinois Soil Health Lab on this and to monitor carbon sequestration.
 - Date restrictions on hay leases for nesting.
 - These practices are valuable in their own right but also as demonstrations for farmers across the state on best practices.

Task Force Discussion

- John Rogner
 - Always get asked why we farm all that land.
 - The answer is complicated, but if IDNR is going to be involved in farming, we want to be doing the best we can in terms of promoting conservation while doing it.
 - Our tenants also farm other lands, so the practices they learn on IDNR land can spread to other areas.
 - Sites leased for agriculture provide income to support operations at state sites.
- Todd Katz
 - These presentations make me proud of what we have done in Illinois so far.
 - Knowing what is happening is really awesome and will make it easier for us to do the rest.
- Jim Herkert
 - Is there an annual goal of nitrogen and phosphorus reduction for the state? Could that be scaled up as part of our efforts here?
- Brian Rennecker
 - The programs discussed are on a volunteer basis, and funded through General Revenue, so it is hard to be consistent enough to establish a program-by-program goal.
 - There is a statewide goal in the NLRS.
- Sen. Dave Koehler
 - The legislature is putting together next year's budget now. I think the task force will be an excellent way to bring some of these concerns together.
 - We have passed legislation on reducing emissions, but carbon sequestration is an entirely different aspect of carbon reduction.
 - Hope we can distribute what we find to my colleagues.
- Olivia Schickel
 - We wanted to clarify this is not a governmental land grab, and these presentations have done a great job of that.
 - Going forward, we should include other youth voices, through Future Farmers of America.
- Austin Omer

- In addition to these programs, there is a lot of acreage outside of any program or in federal programs that has agricultural conservation practices, so we may want to include those as well.

Public Comments (spoken)

Max Webster, American Farmland Trust

- Mission: To save the land by protecting sound farmland practices and keeping farmers on the land.
- We are supporters of the 30 by 30 effort overall, and believe that farmers, ranchers, and foresters are essential allies in this initiative.
- The lands they manage are critical for biodiversity, carbon sequestration, and rural prosperity.
- We need bold new strategies to effectively stabilize the climate and protect biodiversity, and we are encouraged to hear these existing programs, especially Partners for Conservation and Fall Covers for Spring Savings.
- We also believe it is important:
 - To protect vulnerable working lands from being converted to development.
 - To support landowners in voluntary conservation practices, particularly in valuable areas for carbon sequestration and biodiversity.
 - To get CREP back and support structures at the state level that bring federal dollars into Illinois.

Grant Hammer, AISWCD

- Quote for Hugh Hammond Bennett, founder of SWCD: “From every conceivable angle – economic, social, cultural, public health, national defense – the conservation of natural resources is an objective on which all should agree.”
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts work to protect Illinois’ greatest assets – the rich, fertile soils and water resources of the state – through strategic conservation efforts.
- The network of SWCDs represents the local infrastructure for the delivery of state and federal conservation programs in Illinois.
- SWCDs are considered the multipurpose tool in the toolbox for the delivery of state and federal conservation programs in Illinois.
- SWCDs are non-taxing, non-regulatory, volunteer led units of local government.
- SWCDs support voluntary, locally led strategies that further the adoption of conservation practices.
- Today’s SWCDs serve a variety of “non-traditional” audiences, including municipal officials, developers, and a whole new client group: suburban homeowners.
- SWCDs provide a wide range of services which include flood prevention, erosion control, habitat restoration, sediment control, forestry management, and miscellaneous land use services.
- SWCDs implement strategies that reduce the potential for costly flooding and protect water quality by controlling erosion and sedimentation.
- Data trends suggest that Illinois is becoming more precipitous, which creates more erosion, which in turn diminishes water quality.

- The Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy guides state efforts to improve water quality at home and downstream by reducing nitrogen and phosphorus levels in our lakes, streams, and rivers.
- The Gulf of Mexico dead zone is primarily caused by nutrient runoff from urban and rural areas throughout the Mississippi River watershed.
- The Partners for Conservation Program sunsets this year.
 - It is a 30-year-old program funds numerous programs; want to make sure it gets renewed.

Olivia Dorothy, American Rivers

- There is a concerning trend in the 30 by 30 conversation that pays a lot more attention to land than water, while the highest rates of extinction are in aquatic habitats.
 - Even in an inland state like Illinois, a New York Times map shows the highest rates of imperiled biodiversity are in and along our rivers.
- Land conservation can help but does not address issues like water pollution or disconnection of rivers from their floodplains.
- Climate change is expected to cause an expansion of flood prone areas in Illinois by 50% by 2100 at the low end, 80-100% at the high end.
- Would make the following recommendations:
 - Address flood hazards in context of biodiversity.
 - Improve the capacity of soil to hold water and reduce runoff from surface water and tile drainage.
 - Programs spoken to today need increased funding.
 - Develop incentives for farmers who are in flood-prone areas to make sure they are able to convey water during flood events.
 - Crop insurance is structured to incentivize farmers to pump water out of area, which worsens downstream effects.
 - Enhance floodplain restoration:
 - Restoration is not included in the Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy, even though it can remove nitrogen and phosphorus from rivers.
 - Move the floodplain easement program into the annually funded conservation easement suite so can be more regularly funded and used as a pre-disaster mitigation technique.

Nathan Aaberg, Liberty Prairie Foundation

- We own and manage a farm as part of a broader conservation community.
- This initiative comes out of urgent emotional sense – we're 28 points down halfway through the third quarter, so we can't just go for field goals anymore.
- Would make a few suggestions:
 - Keeping score: we need to have key natural resource indicators, maybe as a dashboard, to see if and how we are improving.
 - Is our bird population going up or down, for example.
 - Protection outright should stay on table, especially in key areas that are critical for biodiversity.
 - Agriculture as it is practiced now has been highly counterproductive to the preservation of biodiversity and sequestration of carbon.

- Support what IDNR is doing on their lands; think we should expand those practices.
- Should also pursue more dramatic practices, such as perennial agriculture, regenerative grazing, and dramatic reductions in pesticide use and dangerous chemical use.
 - Current policy is contributing to an insect apocalypse.

Chat Discussion

Scaling Up

- Ted Haffner
 - These programs, partnerships and funding are all impressive and helpful. What is the strategy for scaling up programs from the low hundreds of thousands of acres to the 27 million acres plus of agriculture in Illinois? I figure back of the napkin calculations indicate that roughly less than 1% of Illinois agricultural land has some sort of conservation program.

Tiled Agricultural Land

- Paul Botts, Wetland Initiative
 - John or Bob, are you open to finding spots on IDNR ag-lease ground for some edge of field practices such as tile-treatment wetlands?
- Bob Caveny
 - To the question about IDNR agricultural ground: most of our land is not tiled currently. We have also broken up most of our larger fields into smaller units placing 60-to-120-foot field borders around them to increase wildlife habitat and edge effect. We have also built several wetlands and placed water control structures on field edges to help reduce nutrient loss. The water control structures on field edges are also used to aid in our hunting programs by making additional shallow water areas for waterfowl hunting in the flooded crop residue.

CREP Resiliency

- Jason Bleich
 - Question for Michelle: With CREP being closed for the last seven years, do you see any obstacles with rebuilding the program popularity/landowner demand for the program? Are there ways this group can help promote the program when it opens? Lastly, is there any way to prevent a long-term closure from happening again in the future?
- Michelle Bloomquist
 - Jason Bleich, to answer your question, I do not see any obstacles to the popularity of CREP at this point. We have many landowners contacting IDNR and the SWCDs waiting for reopening. This group can help promote CREP by bringing CREP back into their conversations as a great opportunity to improve water quality on private lands. We are taking steps to prevent future long-term closures on the IDNR side, but CREP initially closed in 2015 due to the budget impasse, and this is something we cannot prevent. Hopefully, this specific problem does not occur again.

Written Comments

Louis Nelms

Can you please tell us what the department is doing to prevent pesticide contamination in streams, or potential injuries to plants and wildlife from pesticides used on state lands?

Are there additional restrictions or requirements held with tenants that farm state owned lands?

Is the state phasing out the use of treated seeds, particularly those treated with neonicotinoids on state lands?

1. I and many others involved in conservation and natural resources have observed a significant amount of tree clearing with bulldozers and track-hoes for expansion of farmlands on private land in the last couple of decades. While much of this is rather degraded habitat, it is still habitat where industrial agriculture nearly totally dominates the landscape. Is the state concerned with this continuing trend and is it doing anything to discourage it?

2. Does the state of Illinois adequately monitor and measure the impacts of industrial agriculture, including pesticides, on natural land communities on public and private land? If not (and many of us think not), what other states could you point to in the Midwest that are providing better models of stewardship? (Might I suggest Minnesota?)

Maxwell Webster, American Farmland Trust

To: Illinois Department of Natural Resources

From: American Farmland Trust

RE: Enlisting Illinois' Farmers, Ranchers and Forestland Owners as Essential Allies for 30 by 30

Date: March 3, 2022

American Farmland Trust's mission is to save the land that sustains us by protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land.

AFT views our nation's farmers, ranchers, and foresters as essential allies in the effort to reach the 30 by 30 goals for biodiversity conservation and climate mitigation. The lands that they manage are critical for wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, food security, clean water, and rural prosperity.

We need bold, new approaches to enlist their help at the vast scale required to effectively protect biodiversity and stabilize the climate. We will need to both protect vulnerable working lands from being permanently converted by development, and support landowners' voluntary efforts to implement conservation practices, particularly in biodiversity hotspots, key connectivity corridors, and areas with high carbon sequestration potential. This is especially true in a state like Illinois, where 75% of the landscape is in agricultural production.

Farmers today are facing more challenges than ever. Market fluctuations, development pressures, impacts from extreme weather, loss of soil health and transitions to the next generation of farmers are all factors putting pressures on agricultural landscapes. Simply put, to be successful

towards these goals, Illinois' 30 by 30 efforts must help farmers address these critical issues by building on the legacy of voluntary, incentive-based and locally led conservation to improve the resilience of farms and farmland.

The benefits of farmland conservation are far reaching. Protected farmland provides a stable base for local agricultural economies that provide us with local food. Conservation practices like cover crops and no-till sequester carbon reduce nutrient losses that contribute to water quality and biodiversity concerns at home and downstream and protect farmers' bottom lines. On-farm habitat areas provide refuge for pollinators and migratory species like birds and butterflies.

AFT recommends that Illinois pursues 30 by 30 goal initiatives with a commitment to protecting and conserving working farmland and rangeland while accelerating the implementation of conservation that protects soil health, reduces nutrient losses, and mitigates climate change. This includes bolstering state programs to be better able to attract additional investment and resources from the federal government.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

[Nathan Aaberg, Liberty Prairie Foundation](#)

During Brenna's presentation about the McHenry County Conservation District's farmland management program, she briefly mentioned the Agricultural Conservation Index (ACI) that we along with Delta Institute and Foresight Design helped the District develop. You asked to learn more about it. So I'm sending this email with two things: (1) a PDF of the basic structure of the original ACI that we worked out (note that the two sheets are intended to be laid out side by side) and (2) just a bit of description of what the ACI was intended to do. Then, I've asked Brenna to jump in and share some more insights (and possibly some documents) about what the MCCD is actually doing with the ACI and where that use might go.

As we worked with the MCCD team in thinking about their farmland management system, we ran into the questions of how to incentivize good farming practices (rather than just dictate everything to the farmers) and to how to easily gauge how well a field was being managed in a short-hand way. The MCCD team (and it probably was Ed) brought up the indexes there are for habitat management that condense complex ecological information into a single numerical score, like the IBI for streams and the Floristic Quality Assessment for terrestrial plant assemblies. Could there be something like that for farmland? And if there was, could farmers somehow be rewarded in their lease terms for a high ACI score?

Delta has also informed us about the STAR program from Champaign County, but we needed something that didn't just look at nutrients but also looked at a more holistic range of conservation concerns, from soil life to habitat to erosion prevention. So you'll see a number of categories of farmland management issues and within those categories specific spectrums of metrics to rate to generate the points that would be rolled up into a total score. I'm convinced that a field that was managed in such a way as to generate a high score would have rich soils, little erosion, richer insect and wildlife activity, and less negative impact on local streams.

The trick with the ACI is that collecting that diverse data could be pretty challenging when the farmers and the district staff people are stretched for time. I believe that's one of the things Brenna and the MCCD are now wrestling with. But I believe that having something like the ACI, even in a more simple version, would be a good scorecard for telling to what degree a farmer is farming a piece of land with a broader commitment to conservation...or not.

Breanna Ness, McHenry County Conservation District

Regarding the Ag Conservation Index, it's a very comprehensive system for tracking the practices being utilized on District ag sites, as well as the status of our soil health and in-field habitats. The District began collecting data in 2019, so we have 3 years of data. The data is simple information to collect, but a lot of it relies on reporting from the tenant, which has been inconsistent. I was hired by the District in May of 2021, and before that the Ag Program Coordinator was part-time. So, we have a good amount of data, but it still needs entered into the database for analysis.

Stacy Bowman, farm owner

I have been following this 30 by 30 Program initiative pushed by the Biden Administration nationwide, and although it is presented in a positive way, it has a lot of negative implications that must be addressed.

Here are my list of questions to this Conservation Task Force panel:

1) You have been appointed to this 24-member panel representing state legislators, agencies, students and "experts" in environmental, economic and recreational aspects of conservation. Do any of these members own land or property that would fall under this category to conserve/preserve?

This appears to me to place other people's land and property rights under control of an administrative state. There is no constitutional or statutory authority for the President, Dept. of Interior, Dept. of Ag., or Gov. Pritzker to set aside or permanently preserve 30 percent of U.S. lands.

2) We already have CRP and other set aside options that are offered to farmers and ranchers. These programs address erosion and wildlife habitat and have been very successful, while also allowing us to produce food, fiber, minerals and energy locally, nationally and internationally. Why is this 30 by 30 plan being pushed now?

The politically motivated climate crisis agenda does not add up. If restricting land solves "climate change" and allegedly prevents species from going extinct, we would not be in a climate crisis today. ONE THIRD of the U.S. is already OWNED by Federal and State Governments and managed under restrictive land use protections.

3) Instead of working with States, local governments and stakeholders, the Biden Administration's first act to implement 30 by 30 was to remove local governments veto power over federal land acquisitions (when they rescinded the Dept. of Interior Secretarial Order 3388). Is this panel aware of this? This is not good.

4) The 30 by 30 plan is not clear on what land is being targeted or how it will be managed. It appears land seized will be set aside permanently and be off-limits to most human use. Why does this plan focus on the rural communities that have good conservation practices in place in order to make a living while developers continue to be allowed to purchase fertile farm ground and are the root of the problem?

In conclusion, I believe the 30 by 30 “Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad” (86 Fed. Reg. 7,619) signed by Biden Jan. 27, 2021, is nothing more than a politically motivated land grab to appease his radical environmental activists (here and abroad) that funded and continue to support his administrative decisions.

The 30 by 30 land grab is unconstitutional in its policy, moving us from a nation founded on private property principles to one controlled by an administrative state. The scare tactics citing human-caused climate impacts, is not substantiated, not enough to continue pursuing and should be tabled indefinitely. We don't need more government control of our lands, we need better land use regulations on development, period. There is no better place than to look at our large cities to see how we have failed at taking care of land now standing in stagnation and are living proof of government-created food deserts!

We need more agricultural opportunities, not less. Allow Illinois and other states to determine what if any properties that come available on the market, should be purchased for wildlife/recreational use when and if needed.

Thank you.

The Conservation Fund (Coalition of Groups)

Dear Illinois 30x30 Conservation Task Force:

The undersigned groups respectfully request the Task Force consider the important role that **Farmland Protection in Illinois** can play in meeting the 30x30 goals.

Per the Task Force [website](#), “rapid land development in Illinois has led to the loss of vast amounts of natural lands and waters.” However, most rapid land development is happening on agricultural lands. A [2017 analysis](#) found that from 2001-2015, three-quarters of greenfield development occurred on agricultural lands.

Illinois farmland is vulnerable to pressures from climate change and shifting land use patterns. Illinois has lost 3.6 million acres of farmland since 1950. From 1992 – 2012 alone, [1,161,000 acres](#) of farmland in Illinois were converted to urban uses and threatened by low density residential development. Note that this period included one of the biggest real estate development downturns on record. New trends including renewable energy development, on-demand delivery service, and pandemic-driven exit from urban areas may aggravate these losses going forward.

Loss of farmland has significant climate impacts that also impact species and ecosystem health. Developed land creates [50-70% higher emissions](#) than land in agricultural production. Intact blocks of farmland in essential conservation corridors also offer one of the best opportunities to connect

and restore habitat to address the biodiversity crisis – as well as to sequester carbon. None of the biologically significant streams in Illinois are located in developed areas - they all pass through areas that are predominantly agricultural. The critical species habitat goals in the [Illinois Wildlife Action Plan](#) require integrating farmland into the conservation landscape to expand, connect and buffer existing natural areas. Farmland that is paved over and fragmented is no longer available to play this important role.

Protecting vulnerable farmland from permanent conversion to development offers one of the biggest **conservation returns on investment**:

- Protected farmland stays in private ownership, on the tax roll, with no ongoing public management cost.
- Significant federal funding is available to purchase Farmland Protection Easements. The 2018 Farm Bill includes \$2.25 Billion in mandatory Farmland Protection Easement funding. Illinois has received less than 1% of this federal funding since it started – despite having some of the most highly productive soils in the country.
- Illinois is leaving these USDA Farmland Protection Easement dollars on the table by not having a source of state match funding.
- By purchasing easements, rather than land, and by leveraging federal dollars, Illinois can accomplish significant permanent land protection to meet 30x30 goals at roughly 10 to 20 cents on the dollar compared to outright land purchases.
- Farmland Protection Easements are a one-time permanent investment that pays returns forever.

With 75% of Illinois in agricultural production, the ambitious goals of 30x30 cannot be met without significant investments in farmland on multiple fronts, including farmland protection. Illinois' farmers are essential allies in the effort to reach the 30x30 goals for biodiversity conservation and climate mitigation. Twenty-eight (28) other states have funded farmland protection easement programs; Illinois should use its 30x30 commitment to do the same.

Please consider a recommendation in your report that Illinois expand its farmland protection program to include funding for the purchase of agricultural conservation easements.

Thank you for your commitment to advancing the 30x30 goals for Illinois and the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,

The Conservation Fund
Emy Brawley, Illinois State Director

American Farmland Trust
Kris Reynolds, Midwest Regional Director

Illinois Environmental Council
Lindsay Keeney, Conservation Director

Prairie State Conservation Coalition
Brook McDonald, Board Chair

The Land Connection
Cassidy Dellorto-Blackwell, Program Manager

The Land Conservancy of McHenry County
Lisa Haderlein, Executive Director

Openlands

Jerry Adelman, President & CEO

Natural Land Institute

Kerry Leigh, Executive Director

The Conservation Foundation

Dan Lobbes, Vice President of Land and Water Programs

Illinois Stewardship Alliance

Liz Stelk, Executive Director

Prairie Land Conservancy

Dave King, Executive Director

Liberty Prairie Foundation

Nathan Aaberg, Director, Conservation & Working Lands

Appendix VI: Cities and Towns Listening Session

Presentations

Chicago Wilderness: Chicago Area Conservation Efforts

- Ben Haberthur
 - Chicago Wilderness as an initiative was prompted from findings from the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory, which produced a report in the 1970s showing the state was at risk of losing unique natural areas.
 - The resulting alliance includes most organizations doing nature work in the Chicago area, who have been convening regularly, even remotely during the pandemic.
 - Can offer a great tool with the Chicago Wilderness GIS Hub overseen by the Field Museum.
- Stacy Meyers
 - The United Nations announced in 2021 that climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution are three self-inflicted planetary crises that are closely interconnected and put the well-being of current and future generations at risk.
 - We need to conserve land and water by 2030 to try to avoid losing 25% of species and hitting the tipping point where our own food web collapses.
 - This is a food security issue as well as an extinction crisis.
 - Right now, 4.15% of land in Illinois is publicly or privately protected natural lands, totaling 1,496,000 acres.
 - 30% of land would be 10.9 million acres.
 - 5% would be 1,801,000 acres, requiring the addition of 305,000 acres.
 - Currently, 75% of Illinois land is in agriculture, 23 million acres, and of that 2.5%, or 594,000 acres, is in CRP.
- Ben Haberthur
 - In the Chicago area, there are 375,000 acres of protected parks and natural lands out of 4,770,000 total acres. To reach 30%, another 1,056,000 acres would be needed.
 - If we break it down by land use though, it starts to look more feasible, as different practices can get conservation value out of different land use types.
 - Important that throughout this is a process that is by the people who live there, not happening to them.

- Stacy Meyers
 - Open space in cities is generally thought of as groomed parks, like Millennium Park, but it can also include natural areas like Indian Ridge Marsh, a remnant wetland on the South Side hosting over 200 bird species, including some endangered.
 - These areas and other formerly industrial areas can be both a natural asset and an economic driver by healing that part of the state.
 - Improving the Chicago River system can do the same.
 - Throughout, need to engage communities, honor their priorities and values.
 - Even in urban areas can have vast landscapes like Glacier Park.
- Ben Haberthur
 - Looking at biodiversity concentration, the area with the most concentrated biodiversity at risk is northeast Illinois, because the geologic processes that left much of Illinois productive farmland did not make it advantageous to develop northeast Illinois for farming.
 - Chicago Wilderness has produced a series of reports: Atlas of Biodiversity, the Biodiversity Recovery Plan, and Green Infrastructure Vision.
 - These cover where biodiversity is and is threatened, how we protect and recover, and how we more specifically connect hubs through corridors.
- Stacy Meyers
 - There are a wide variety of opportunities to promote green space in urban settings, ranging from parks and urban farms to yards, tree canopy, corporate campuses, and providing green infrastructure.
- Ben Haberthur
 - Even in urban cores, there is a lot of green space that could be restored to serve as natural habitat, like the Burnham Wildlife Corridor.
 - Converting turf to pollinator habitat can be cheap, take only two to three years, and reduce mowing costs and emissions.
- Stacy Meyers
 - The SpaceToGrow program converts broken asphalt in schoolyards to mixed-use green space for play and education, which also soaks up extra rainwater.
- Ben Haberthur
 - Looking at different land cover types, the opportunity to work with private individuals to do this work in residential areas really stands out.
 - Open space conservation is still a large category, and the latest FPD was established just in 2008, but new models of conservation are important too.

IDNR Staff: Tree City USA

- Mike Brunk, from IDNR's Urban and Community Forestry Program, presented on the Tree City USA program and opportunities for cities to improve urban tree canopy.
 - The program's main task is to promote how trees play a key role in the vitality of a community; to grow, maintain, and preserve urban forest across the state.
 - The Arbor Day Foundation provides an excellent outreach tool with its Tree City USA program, in which Illinois has 188 participants covering 61% of the population, ranging from Chicago to the village of Stuart with just 229 people.

- Tree cover can mitigate heat islands, sequester carbon, and provide wildlife habitat, and helps communities further by attracting residents and businesses, providing energy savings, and improving local health.
- The Tree City USA program helps make communities aware of this, builds support among community residents, and provide education and assistance.

Task Force Discussion

- John Rogner
 - Have worked with the Chicago Trees Initiative and understand the value of urban forestry, which as Mike noted contributes to both mitigating climate change and biodiversity loss.
- Todd Katz
 - Is there a Tree School USA program?
- Mike Brunk
 - Yes, it is called the Tree Campus USA program, feel free to reach out to me with more questions.
- Olivia Schickel
 - Agree that it is important to have a discussion on how to bring those resources to schools.
- Jim Herkert
 - Would like to thank Chicago Wilderness, we often take for granted what an incredible organization it is and how much they provide in opportunities for protection and outreach.
- John Rogner
 - Also struck me that it is not an insurmountable lift when we think outside the box.

Public Comments (spoken)

Belinda McAllister, Heartland Conservancy

- Work in southwest Illinois, have spent the last two years figuring out creative ways to work with IDNR on urban forestry, and especially with BIPOC communities in the area.
- Have found that bringing directly to local governments is less effective for lack of funding, but there are private landowners that would like to plant trees on their land, so directing funding and assistance there can improve habitat and build support with the local government.

Task Force Discussion

- Todd Katz
 - Many companies will provide a match for donations, could that be set up for tree planting through Tree City USA?
- Mike Brunk
 - Certainly, have worked previously to help direct funds to communities, and have discussed the possibility of getting corporate matches.
- Jim Herkert
 - Think that option has real potential, especially in underserved communities, to make funding such projects viable.

- Can think about what has to happen to support that.
- Paul Ritter
 - Seems like we have a marketing problem, and we could have a vast impact if we make the connections with these community members, cities, schools, since people are willing.
 - Living Lands and Waters wants to give away a million trees.
- Todd Katz
 - At a previous school, Chicago Streets and Sanitation and Forestry Departments came to plant about 70 trees in a single day, using Streets and Sanitation equipment to cut concrete, which made it really easy.
 - Could we offer that opportunity to residents?

Kimberly Fair, Illinois Environmental Council

- The 30 by 30 movement requires us to prioritize the most vulnerable communities that are on the front lines of climate change, and to build climate resiliency in nature-deprived, low-income communities.
- Need to consider historic inequalities in open lands, natural areas, and green infrastructure.
- Suggest a staged approach:
 - 1. Community organization and engagement to understand local priorities and needs, focusing on communities with high levels of socioeconomic nature deprivation.
 - 2. Training and employment of community members, especially youth, to build green infrastructure, not just in labor roles but in planning, organizing, and management.
 - 3. Implementation of a variety of forms of green infrastructure: trails, paths, tree canopy, restoring degraded land and water, and education.
- Belinda McAllister
 - Working on that kind of approach in southwest Illinois
 - Received a letter from an East St. Louis resident who wanted to create a park, so worked with them to apply for a grant to create it.
 - That work sparked more engagement by the city and future efforts such as an Earth Day cleanup and tree planting.

Sarah Surroz, Openlands

- There are opportunities to scale up existing programs, such as the Conservation at Home and the Lands and Harmony Programs.
- There has been high demand for Conservation at Home, which has certified more than 1,700 properties, mostly residential.
- People want to contribute but need to know how to plant trees, reduce invasive species, create pollinator habitat, manage stormwater.

Olivia Dorothy, American Rivers

- Illinois can create ribbons of conservation along rivers.
- See three issues in this area
 - For the biodiversity crisis, floodplains are some of the most productive habitat in the world
 - Urban flood plains are also environmental justice areas, where redlining and racist housing policies have kept communities of color and low wealth in high hazard areas

- Climate change is expected to cause more flooding, expanding the 100 Year Flood Plain by 40% by 2100 in general, and by 100% in certain areas of Illinois.
- This is creating a domestic refugee crisis that needs addressing along with the opportunity to do conservation along our rivers.
- We must be intersectional and bring in multiple agencies to deal with these issues and areas, not just restoration but public safety, affordable housing and relocation needs.
 - Think the state can do a much better job of integrating resources in these areas.
- No one from IDNR's Office of Water Resources is here now.

Task Force Discussion

- Paul Ritter
 - Having these great discussions, a great amount is focused on land, but should include water.
 - Many speakers today, but seems like we lack connectivity, except in this task force.
- Sen. Koehler
 - Think it would be nice to identify projects in urban areas that could promote interest and education.
 - Floodplain in Peoria is often forgotten.
- Todd Katz
 - Thinking about establishing bird areas, for nesting and migration.
 - How do we provide for hunters and anglers and improve the quality of environment?
- Bob Caveny
 - Most river pollution comes from land runoff, so land policies to reduce nutrient load, improve water filtration, and create wetlands can help with water habitat.
- John Rogner
 - Agree important to remember that floodplains are often EJ areas.
- Ben Haberthur
 - Lack of state level coordination seems to be a theme.
- Jim Herkert
 - Think the Prairie State Conservation Coalition would be a partner in that kind of coordination, as they do want to reach beyond land trust work but would not be the coordinator.
 - Agree that connecting existing great programs could be something for the task force to discuss.
- John Rogner
 - Think Chicago Wilderness is a good model for this.
- Stacy Meyers
 - The existing 30 by 30 coalition, many members in Chicago Wilderness, could be a helpful tool for that.
- Austin Omer
 - Seems like we need to have an idea of what all the conservation efforts around the state are so we can get our arms around it.
- Paul Ritter
 - Is it beyond the task force to have a central location set up to show all these programs?

Chat Discussion

Funding

- Rebecca Judd
 - To support the 30 by 30 opportunities highlighted in the slides, much more public funding will be needed to support this. How is IDNR and others thinking about this?

Conservation at Home

- Pati Vitt
 - Just a comment: Belinda McAllister's comments and the quantification of the residential portion of land use brought to mind the efforts of Conservation at Home, which brings green infrastructure to residences. Making funding available, property tax credits, etc., for residential property owners to install and maintain native plantings/trees might help propel these efforts, particularly true in low-income areas.
- Ben Habarthur
 - I want to second Pati Vitt's comments. Conservation at Home has been very effective in Chicagoland and would be hugely beneficial if scaled to the state.

Equity and Engagement

- Stacy Meyers
 - This ties into Justice40, the federal initiative to ensure communities are healthy, resilient, and biodiverse in tandem with and as part of America the Beautiful.
- Abigail Derby Lewis
 - Underscoring Kimberly's comments on community engagement. For example, while planting trees may seem to have universal interest, there are many reasons some people do not want more trees in their neighborhoods. It's important to first commit to understanding what different communities may want and value and then connect these interests to conservation strategies.
<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/01/190107142109.htm>
- Laura Reilly
 - I agree Kim. With support from IDNR Urban and Community Forestry program and USDA Forest service, Chicago Wilderness has been advancing an equity workshop series to advance these goals throughout the region. These workshops help understand barriers and reduce the inequities throughout the region. All CW partners and others have been able to participate.
<https://www.chicagowilderness.org/page/EquityWorkshops>
- Abigail Derby Lewis
 - I also think we need to be working closely with social scientists, not just when we get to the implementation, but on the front end with engagement and planning.

Development

- Adrian Ayres Fisher
 - I am with West Cook Wild Ones and volunteer with FPDCC. Is there discussion about the impact of development both on new open lands and adjacent to protected areas? How can sustainable *redevelopment* (i.e., recycling) of previously used lands

be prioritized? Protected areas and wild species are under constant threat. The Carvana tower threatening Harms Woods, the threats to Bell Bowl Prairie, and Wolf Road Prairie come to mind. How can we accomplish 30 by 30 if we keep losing areas (and wild species) due to development?

Written Comments

Brad Wilson, Naperville Park District

Thank you again for inviting the Naperville Park District to share thoughts with the 30 by 30 Conservation Task Force at your upcoming listening session. I had an opportunity to consult with our staff and develop the following written comments to share with the task force. We're very appreciative of the work the 30 by 30 Conservation Task Force is completing on behalf of our residents. We look forward to continuing a number of Green initiatives and working with the task force in the future to support land and water conservation.

Park districts throughout the State of Illinois can contribute to the 30 by 30 plan in the areas of increasing biodiversity and decreasing pollution in our natural areas, as well as through preserving open space when possible through partnerships, donations and grants. The Naperville Park District manages over 2,400 acres of parks with approximately 300 acres of natural areas. We believe there is an opportunity to do more to increase biodiversity in these areas if more funding was available for removing invasive species, and planting/maintaining native trees and plants. In addition, the Naperville Park District maintains more than 30 retention ponds throughout the community in support of managing storm water within our region. Many of the ponds are in need of dredging, and the shorelines need to be stabilized and restored with native plants. The park district has completed several pond dredging and shoreline stabilization projects at our parks, however, there are opportunities to do much more if funding was available. Funding also is needed for other green infrastructure projects, such as permeable pavers, that help clean the groundwater and rivers and streams. Increasing available grant funding in these areas would allow park districts to contribute more toward providing clean water and biodiversity within our communities

We also encourage the task force to create or recommend a best practices manual for land owners, including guidance on the use of herbicides, pesticides and fungicides in order to increase pollinators. Increasing pollinators, and insects in general, will go a long way toward increasing biodiversity since insects are such an important food source.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our thoughts. We look forward to attending the listening session and learning more about how we can continue to support land and water conservation.

Iris Caldwell, Chicago Living Corridors

TO: Illinois Department of Natural Resources

FROM: Chicago Living Corridors

DATE: March 16, 2022

SUBJECT: Illinois 30 by 30 Conservation Task Force - Cities & Towns Listening Session

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written comments ahead of the Illinois 30 by 30 Conservation Task Force listening session on conservation in cities and towns.

Chicago Living Corridors is a not-for-profit umbrella organization comprised of organizations dedicated to the furtherance of native habitat. It provides private landowners with inspiration and resources to help them support pollinator and bird populations, conserve clean water, increase biodiversity and restore soil. Inspired by Doug Tallamy's vision of a Homegrown National Park, we believe private landowners have an important role to play in reversing ecosystem loss and fragmentation, land and water pollution, and climate change. Our sense of urgency is driven by the dramatic loss of biodiversity locally, regionally, nationally, and globally.

With the vast majority of land throughout Illinois (and the U.S. more generally) in the hands of private ownership, Chicago Living Corridors is committed to engaging private landowners to embrace their increasingly important role in reversing the negative changes taking place in our natural world. Chicago Living Corridors' mission is to promote the idea that private landowners can be vectors for positive change by restoring wildlife habitat on their land and creating habitat corridors between protected conservation areas.

Chicago Living Corridors strives to amplify the work of its partner organizations, which promote the use of native plants and natural habitats on private landscapes. These organizations include:

- Barrington Area Conservation Trust
- Citizens for Conservation
- DuPage Monarch Project/Monarch Watch
- Forest Preserves of Cook County/University of Illinois Extension
- Illinois Audubon Society Bird and Butterfly program (Chicago region)
- Natural Lands Institute (northern Illinois)
- Northern Kane Wild Ones
- Openlands
- Red Stem Native Landscapes
- The Conservation Foundation (Conservation @Home program)
- The Land Conservancy of McHenry County
- West Cook Wild Ones
- Wildflower Preservation and Propagation Committee (McHenry County)

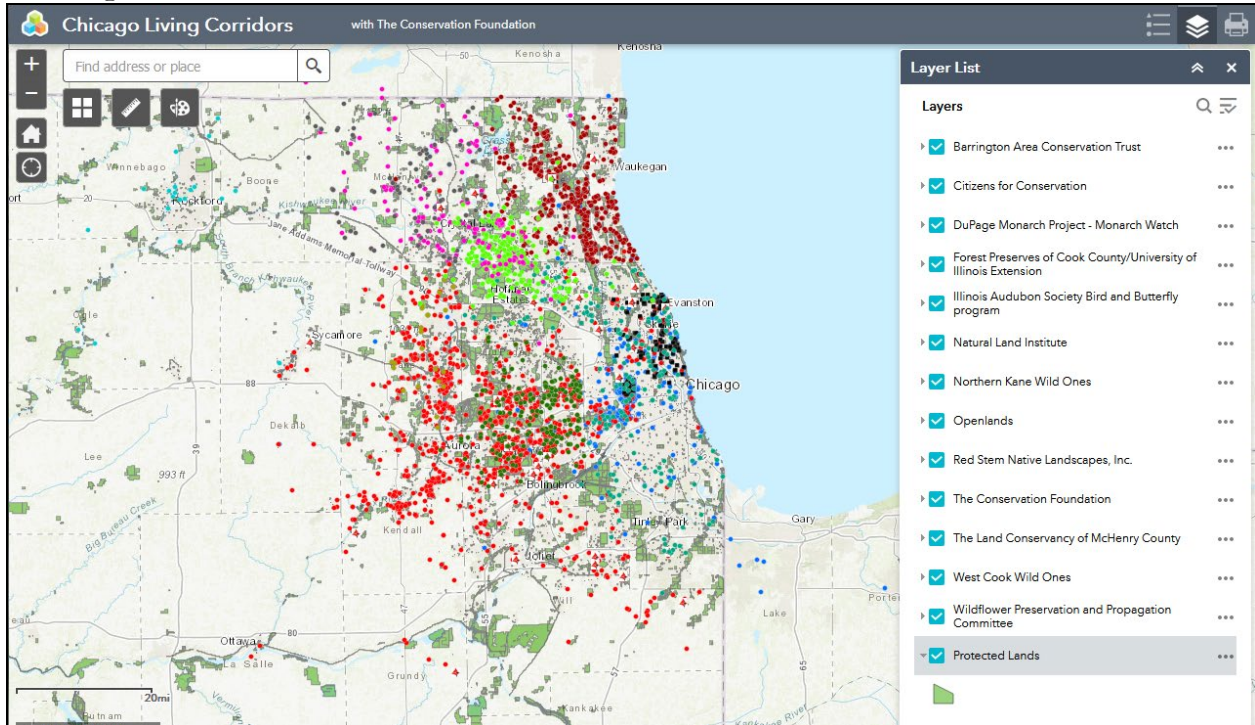
In addition to encouraging individuals to join these local conservation organizations, Chicago Living Corridors maintains an interactive online map of private properties registered as habitat areas with one of the partner organizations. Each partner organizations maintains its own criteria and process for registering private properties as quality habitats. There are currently 3,391 properties registered with 13 organizations across the Chicago region. For comparison, there are 12,138 plantings across the U.S. registered on the [Homegrown National Park](http://HomegrownNationalPark.org) website. The Chicago Living Corridors' interactive map is available here:

<https://tcfwatersheds.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=cfeedc632f454f20b8d384edbc527114>. A snapshot of the current map is also provided below.

Chicago Living Corridors also maintains a directory of native plant nurseries and other service providers as well as a collection of relevant resources on its website:

<https://chicagolivingcorridors.org/>. Since June 2020, Chicago Living Corridors has organized regular webinars featuring a range of topics and speakers from across the Chicago region.

Interactive map featuring registered private property habitat locations across the Chicago region. Protected lands are shown in green.



Elizabeth Kessler, Chicago Wilderness

RE: 30x30 - Framework for realizing and measuring the goals of 30x30 in the Chicago Wilderness region of Illinois

Dear Mr. Lynch & Members of the IDNR 30x30 Task Force,

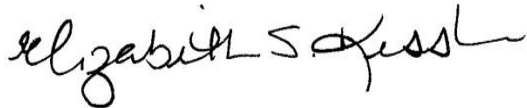
Chicago Wilderness (CW), a regional alliance of more than 250 organizations, works collectively on landscape-scale conservation and human wellbeing in a metropolis of 8 million acres and 10 million people centered on the southern tip of Lake Michigan. CW's mission dovetails with the current effort of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) to set aspirational goals for conservation as part of the national and global effort to protect 30% of lands and waters by 2030 (30x30).

The 30x30 initiative presents a generational opportunity to make the case that conservation matters to all the people of Illinois, in all the spaces where we live, work, play, and enjoy the benefits of healthy nature. Two-thirds of the state's people live in Northeastern Illinois. Here, Chicago Wilderness has advanced a national model that conservation can and should touch the lives of everyone.

As the Chicago Wilderness alliance, we have the pleasure to submit the attached statement to IDNR as a framework for realizing and measuring the goals of 30x30 in the Illinois portion of CW. By

activating all land types—agricultural, residential, corporate—into our strategy, we maximize the benefits to humans and wildlife, and increase our climate resiliency. This holistic approach will make the results more equitable, achievable, and sustainable.

Yours in Conservation,



Elizabeth S. Kessler, MBA, CPRE
Chair, Chicago Wilderness

cc: Laura Reilly, Coordinator, Chicago Wilderness

Making 30x30 a Reality: Mobilizing a Green Region for All

Chicago Wilderness embraces the unique opportunity that the 30x30 initiative inspires: to mobilize a green region for all—humans and nature. In our large urban center, the capacity to deliver on the 30x30 goals will come not just from traditional conservation lands and waters, but from activating every land type—agricultural, residential, corporate—to contribute to overall regional health. This inclusive approach to thriving nature expresses the Green Vision of Chicago Wilderness, which encompasses all landscapes in our drive to nourish the natural world and build resilience for our collective home.

Chicago Wilderness (CW), an alliance of more than 250 organizations, was founded at the end of the 20th century. We work collectively on landscape-scale conservation and human wellbeing in a metropolis of 8 million acres and 10 million people, centered on the southern tip of Lake Michigan and encompassing portions of four states. From southeastern Wisconsin through northern Illinois and Indiana, and into southwestern Michigan, Chicago Wilderness works across political boundaries to deliver real-time solutions to regional conservation issues.

In our early efforts, CW developed a Biodiversity Recovery Plan and Green Infrastructure Vision (GIV) for the region: a vibrant greenway corridor system connecting nature areas, totaling 1.8 million acres to enhance quality of life for our diverse communities. By connecting, buffering, and expanding biodiversity landscapes strategically, the GIV demonstrated how our metropolis could continue to develop, while still conserving the critical natural systems that form the foundation of our health and economy.

As the alliance matured so did our vision for what constitutes a thriving natural world. In 2018 CW expanded the 1.8-million-acres GIV into a full Green Vision, with the aim of engaging people from all walks of life, and of integrating all landscape types in our concept of healthy nature. The Green Vision now encompasses the region's entire 7.8 million acres (see Map 1).

With the energy and momentum of 30x30 and America the Beautiful, our Green Vision becomes attainable. Below we offer recommendations that focus on the Illinois portion of CW (CW-IL, see Map 2; 4.8 million acres), and on transforming 30% of those acres into a green region by 2030 (see Table 1). We propose specific recommendations in the Appendix.

Activating All Landscape Types to Contribute to 30x30

All land types have crucial and complementary roles to play in sustaining healthy ecosystems, mitigating climate change, and ensuring that every person has access to clean air, clean water, and green spaces. By targeting all landscape types, urban regions make the 30x30 goals achievable, while contributing to the wellbeing of the state's largest concentration of people, and marshalling the largest number of acres in support of threatened and endangered species and natural communities, as well as groundwater resources, pollinators, and migratory birds. This comprehensive approach answers the call by the United Nations that is echoed in America the Beautiful to enhance biodiversity (and prevent loss), increase resiliency of communities to a changing climate, and reduce pollution to our region's lands, air, and waters.

We have imagined what 30x30 would look like in the Chicago Wilderness region. Taking the Illinois portion of Chicago Wilderness (see Map 2; 12.9% of the state's area), if only conservation spaces were targeted, a daunting 1,056,000 acres of new conservation lands and waters would be needed to achieve the goals of 30x30 (see Table 1). (For scale, Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, the largest open space in the region, is almost 20,000 acres.) But when all land types contribute, the number of new conservation acres becomes 55,500, with significant 30x30 acreage coming from using regenerative agriculture on working lands (807,000 acres), and from green infrastructure in the built landscape (456,000 acres in greenway corridors, residential backyards, corporate campuses, rights-of-way, revitalized brownfields, green roofs, and others).

Although these numbers are currently approximations (30% of each land cover) and will require further refinement, the impact of mobilizing all landscape types is clear. Incorporating all landscapes also maximizes benefits across the region, both for people and the rest of nature. Green spaces and green infrastructure in cities, suburbs, villages, and rural lands carry the promise that all people, especially those in underserved and historically marginalized neighborhoods, have direct access to healthy nature. From a climate perspective, this holistic approach to 30x30 ensures that the social and public health benefits also are met. Meanwhile, the 55,500 acres of newly protected conservation lands and waters can focus more specifically on the highest contributions to biodiversity.

Developing a Set of Minimum Standards for What Acres Should Qualify

For acres to be counted toward 30x30, they should meet an established set of minimum standards that are consistent across the region. Chicago Wilderness is developing proposed definitions for consideration.

In the realm of agriculture, CW is considering 3 groupings based on soil health: conventional (continuing soil loss and declining soil health), sustainable (maintaining soil and stable soil health), and regenerative agriculture (building soil and increasing soil health). Shifting from one category to the next is a process, and the use of chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers) reflects this: In conventional agriculture chemicals are applied uniformly, with a calculated amount per acre (based on yield). In sustainable agriculture, technology allows the use of chemicals to be targeted per square foot and the drive is to cut costs by reducing chemicals. In regenerative agriculture farmers develop systems that eventually eliminate the use of chemicals. The 30x30 goal is to achieve 30% of working lands in regenerative or sustainable agriculture by 2030. Strategies will be diverse, and vary for public-owned, private-owned, and absentee-owned farms.

For built spaces the focus will be on green infrastructures and native plantings, with the following categories: (i) no plantings, (ii) green cover, and (iii) native plantings, with the goal of 30% in categories ii and iii. This can be achieved through residential backyards, schoolyards, green roofs, transformed corporate campuses, rights-of-ways, revitalized brownfields, and other efforts.

For already protected landscapes, the focus will be on increasing restoration to enhance ecological health. The following categories are being considered: (i) no restoration, (ii) restoration efforts in progress, and (iii) acres restored and actively managed. The goal is to have at least 30% of existing conservation holdings restored and actively managed or in progress by 2030. Our goal also includes maintaining and restoring the region's watersheds to uphold the integrity and diversity of high-quality waters and restore ones that are impaired.

For existing or additional city parks, the focus will be on proximity to neighborhoods and on quality of the habitat (based on native plantings and management). The goal is accessible city parks containing thriving native plantings, within half a mile of every neighborhood. Since the climate crisis impacts certain communities disproportionately, special consideration should be given to identify vulnerable areas and, most importantly, to listen actively to local needs. Mechanisms should be in place to work with environmental justice communities, so that the benefits of 30x30 are equitable across the region.

To identify those acres envisioned to be added to existing conservation holdings, the focus will be on the highest gains for biodiversity. This includes securing protection for the following: all Illinois Natural Area Inventory (INAI) sites that remain unprotected, along with other high-quality preserves; lands identified by the CW Biodiversity Recovery Plan Community Assessment as having high 'Biological Importance,' and [IDNR](#) and watershed plans for protection of aquatic resources. Lands that expand or connect protected areas (with the goal of increasing connectivity by 5% by 2030), unprotected stands of Oak Ecosystems, and large sites with remnant natural communities also will be of primary importance. Plans for increasing protected areas will account for shifting ranges due to climate change.

Making the 30x30 Vision Happen

The needs for achieving the 30x30 vision are different under each land type. The first step will be to determine the baseline acreage for each category under each landscape type.

For 30x30 to be successful, engagement with all stakeholders—from farmers, to community members and community-based organizations, to land managers, students, volunteers, scientists, professionals, civic leaders, and public officials—will be crucial throughout the process, from strategy development to implementation. CW also stresses the importance of focusing on resilient lands: regions with high climate-adaptation potential (see Map 3, courtesy of [The Nature Conservancy](#)). Reconnecting these areas through activities like restoring adjacent rivers, wetlands, and waterways, will help bolster habitat function, facilitate carbon sequestration, and provide multiple benefits for humans and wildlife, ranging from clean water to navigable corridors.

We briefly summarize some of the top needs and strategies below, in descending order of acreage in CW-IL.

a. **807,000 acres in sustainable or regenerative agriculture**

Overall needs to scale up: Coordination with and among primary actors (especially those with long-term relationships with farmers, including the Regional Conservation Partnership Program); collaborations at local government, county, and watershed/Soil and Water Conservation District levels; campaign to show the direct production and economic benefits of regenerative agriculture to farmers; dissemination of technical assistance and diversification of NGOs who work directly with farmers; protection of important farmlands; exchanges of successful practices among farmers; market incentives; and a system of inducements for (i) farm trials and transition from conventional to sustainable to regenerative practices, (ii) farmers to keep acres in current and future Farm Bill conservation programs (such as the Conservation Reserve Program) for the long term or in perpetuity, and (iii) farmers to implement practices that allow nesting birds to succeed (i.e., late season haying after breeding season) and pollinators to thrive. Strategies will be different for public, private, and absentee-owned farms.

Defining standards and metrics: Minimum standards exist for water quality, but standards for biodiversity will need to be developed, focusing especially on pollinators (native plantings), migratory birds (shrublands and grasses), nesting shrubland and grassland birds (fence-line habitat management), and shorebirds (management of small ponds). Protocols also will be needed for monitoring the biodiversity targets along with selection of indicator species as feasible, and sampling regime.

b. **456,000 acres in green infrastructure** (e.g., native plantings in corporate and institutional campuses, rights-of-ways, residential backyards, green roofs, and revitalized brownfields)

Overall needs to scale up: Fostering expansive networks of green corridors and green infrastructure; advocating for green infrastructure to be a significant component of federal and state infrastructure spending; ensuring that approved gray infrastructure spending on new projects includes components of appropriate green infrastructure; curbing urban sprawl; addressing local weed ordinances to allow for residential yard habitat; launching an effective campaign to promote native plantings in yard and community spaces, urban gardens, green roofs, and vacant lots, along with technical assistance to implement such practices; promoting tree-lined streets (increasing urban tree canopy); revitalizing brownfields and improving impacted waters; introducing a possible system of tax credit for residences that meet a standard of native plantings (similar to CRP but for homes with smaller lots); encouraging grant programs for municipalities to assist homeowners or block groups to install and maintain native plantings (in backyards, vacant lots, sidewalks); using community-driven conservation models, such as Space to Grow, to deploy green infrastructure practices at scale that reflect and meet the priorities, needs, and values of people where they live, throughout the region.

Defining standards and metrics: In coordination with other agencies and programs (e.g., Conservation @ Home, Monarch Waystation Program), CW will need to develop standards for the proportion of native plantings necessary for 'green acres' in built-up spaces to qualify. A system for recording and regularly updating green acres, as well a

protocol for monitoring their condition, will need to be implemented (e.g., the Chicago Region Tree Census).

c. 93,600 conservation acres under restoration and active management

Overall needs to scale up: Raising tax caps on Operational Budgets for land-management agencies, increasing funding available under the Illinois Natural Areas Stewardship Act, or developing alternative funding mechanisms to increase capacity for land managers to scale up acreage under restoration (burn, control of invasive species, seeding); increasing availability of native seeds; supporting collaborations (e.g., a Chicago Wilderness Cooperative Weed Management Team; an Invasive Species Council in IL); creating Wetland Restoration and Preservation Plans (like the one crafted by the [Lake County Stormwater Management Commission](#)); expanding Conservation Corps type programming to increase labor force working on restoration, and to increase pathways to conservation careers; coordinating with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to develop precision conservation priorities in the Lake Michigan watershed to ensure the protection of Lake Michigan.

Defining standards and metrics: Coordination among land-managers will be needed to integrate existing standards for each of the three categories (no restoration, restoration underway, restored with management), and to agree on monitoring regime. Mapping the different categories will allow for most effective tracking of the acreage restored in CW-IL (see CW Hub below). Coordination with the Prairie Research Institute will allow analysis of existing data to determine baselines and trends.

d. 55,500 acres of new conservation lands and waters

Needs to deliver: 55,500 acres is a substantial departure from the region's average of 2,000 acres added per year for the past decade (with close to 7,000 acres per year required in the 8 remaining years to 2030). However, the momentum of 30x30 opens up the immense opportunity to make this stretch-goal possible. Besides funding to acquire lands, it would be important to develop new ways to add conservation holdings, especially from the private sector. A visioning retreat bringing together top thinkers in the region and emerging next generation conservation leaders would help not only to review availability, methodology, and opportunity for conserving lands and waters outright, but also to find new ways of incorporating lands and waters that are not conventionally conserved into a healthy functioning ecosystem. Working with existing Watershed Workgroups and implementing recommendations of existing watershed plans would underscore priority action areas for protection of water resources. Adequately funding different conservation models will be vital.

Other needs include the following: communications campaign (to explain benefits to all and engage enthusiastic supporters); policy support (to promote referendums and open up alternative funding options); priority ranking for potential conservation areas (starting with unprotected INAI sites); relationship-building with private land owners of interest (trained negotiators and a potential partnership with the Illinois Realtors Association); a regional proactive strategy to ensure zero loss of high-quality natural areas (those

identified in the Biodiversity Recovery Plan, especially INAI sites, and oak and aquatic ecosystems).

Engaging officials at all levels to value and protect natural areas throughout the region will be essential. Integrating watershed plans and natural resource data into land use and transportation planning and performance criteria, and advocating for growth and development to complement our natural resources will be crucial for the success of 30x30 in metropolitan regions across the country.

e. **18,900 acres of city parks under improved management for native plants and wildlife, and for people**

Overall needs to scale up: campaign to generate widespread understanding of benefits and participation from neighbors; listening sessions to incorporate local aspirations, create demand, and engage volunteers; wide collaboration between and among park districts and CW members to make the transformations successful, provide implementation training, and maximize benefits; engaging public officials to emphasize a healthy environment and access to open space in all neighborhoods; focusing on underserved communities with open space deficits, and agencies such as park districts that are positioned to expand and steward these kinds of places. Empowering local models such as steady funding for local land trusts in urban areas can expand opportunities for communities to define and participate in the stewardship of their own neighborhood parks and gardens to reflect their priorities, identity, history, and values.

Defining standards and metrics: In coordination with other agencies, CW will need to develop standards for the proportion of native plantings necessary for ‘green acres’ within built spaces to qualify. Qualifying city parks should be mapped to ensure that every neighborhood has access to healthy green space (ideally within a 10-minute walk). A system for recording and regularly updating green acres, as well as a protocol for monitoring their condition, will need to be implemented, if possible, with a cadre of volunteers from local neighborhoods.

Telling the 30x30 Story – How to Track Success

A central, interactive platform — like the [Chicago Wilderness Hub](#) — is ideal to document the baselines and track progress toward the 30x30 goals. A designated group of point people or volunteers could do the regular updating for each landscape type, once protocols are established. The progress should be mapped for at least the major land types described above. A system for verifying and ground-truthing would need to be developed. Making high-resolution LiDAR-based land cover data available statewide will be crucial, along with continued technical improvements that aid in remote identification of invasive species infestations.

The 30x30 initiative presents a generational opportunity to make the case that conservation matters to all the people of Illinois, in all the spaces where they live, work, play, and enjoy the benefits of healthy nature. Two-thirds of the state’s people live in Northeastern Illinois. Here, Chicago Wilderness has advanced a national model that conservation can and should touch the lives of everyone.

By activating all land types, the 30x30 goals become a realizable stretch. Considerable funding will be essential, yet the funding required will be minimal compared to the cost of increasing our protected landscapes by 1.06 million acres, or of doing nothing. And the substantial benefits to humans and targeted wildlife will be significantly more sustainable and climate resilient when all landscapes contribute. The 30x30 and American the Beautiful initiatives make this the moment to act.

Drawing on a Powerful Conservation Past to Bring a New Conservation Future into Being

The Chicago Wilderness region has roots that stretch deep into the beginnings of the modern conservation movement. From the creation of the nation's first forest preserves, to the development of Chicago's Burnham Plan, to Chicago Wilderness's own Biodiversity Recovery Plan, the region carries the identity of an epicenter for land preservation efforts integrated into the daily life of its citizens.

The people of the region consistently support both financial and political efforts to increase the size and accessibility of open space through public referendums, voting to issue close to 1.5 billion dollars (approximately \$2.14 billion adjusted for inflation) between 1990 and 2022 to support these efforts. The more than 375,000 protected acres that form the concentric rings of green from Lake Michigan outward to the edge of the CW region in Illinois are a testimony to this intergenerational commitment to a thriving natural world.

This deep connection to the lands of Chicago Wilderness form not only a powerful foundation of conservation efforts but also a firm runway to provide the lift for future efforts that will bring the vision of 30x30 from dream to reality. This document should not be seen as a final plan, but rather as a strong beginning, created through the shared effort of the region's conservation thinkers, imbued with the deep passion for local landscape the citizens of the region possess, and established in the same spirit that has driven conservation forward in Chicago's Wilderness for the past century.

Appendix: Some Specific Recommendations

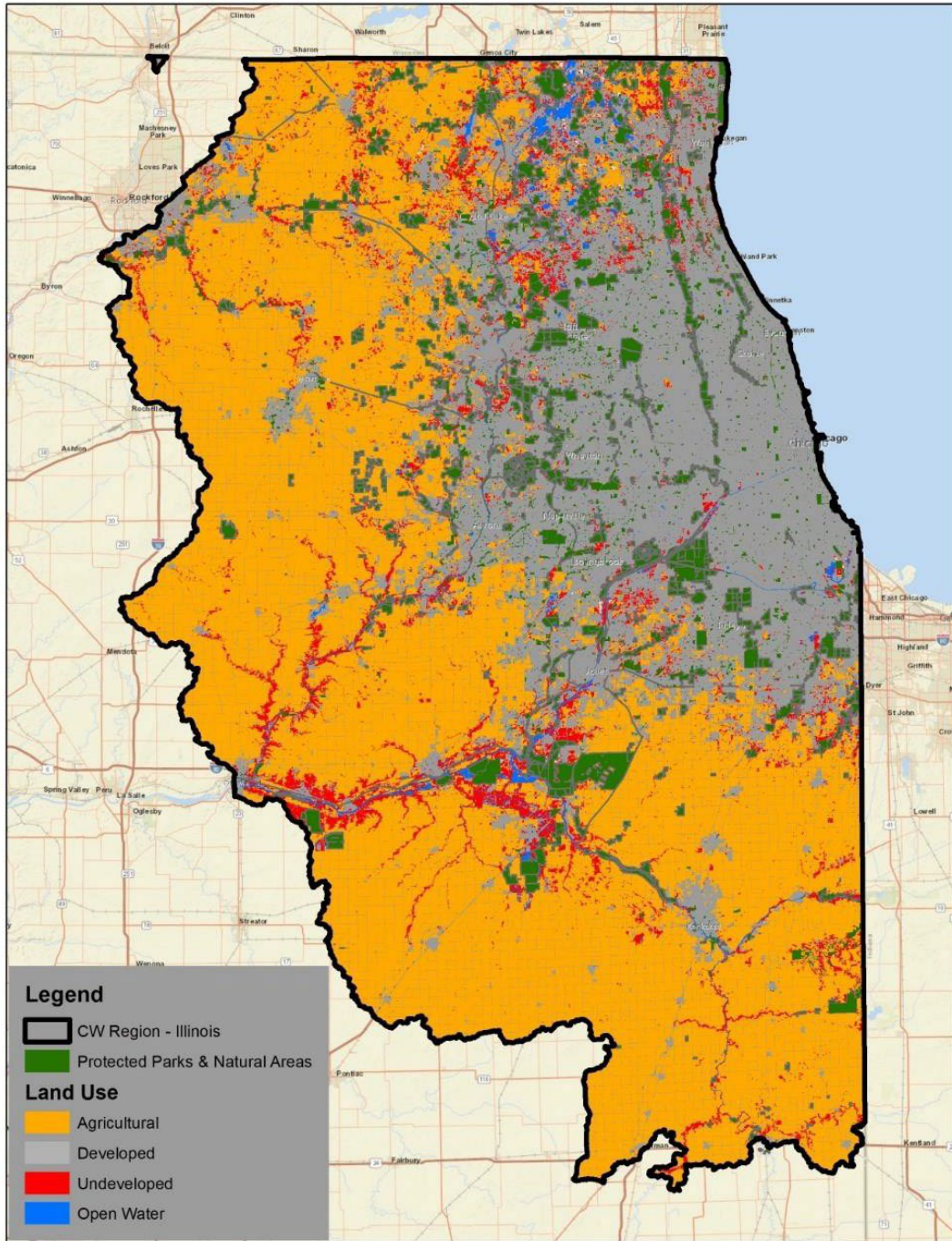
1. Execute strategic land acquisitions through LAWCON and Natural Areas Fund.
2. Increase and incentivize voluntary conservation easements.
3. Evaluate conservation restoration efforts and manage adaptively.
4. Accelerate regional collaboration-led conservation efforts: Watershed Workgroups, NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program, Millennium Reserve, Kankakee Sands, Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge, Illinois Beach, Lake Plain Coastal Restoration Project, others.
5. Support and fund nature-based solutions to address climate resiliency and environmental remediation.
6. Support creating jobs by investing in restoration and resilience projects and initiatives, including the Civilian Climate Corps.

7. Focus on natural community restoration and species recovery efforts that are identified in State Action Plans. Encourage collaborations like the Chicago Wilderness Priority Species, Chicago Regional Tree Initiative, Oak Ecosystem Recovery Plan, and Chicago Wilderness Wetland Conservation Strategy.
8. Encourage more parks and safe outdoor opportunities in nature-deprived communities that increases access to outdoor recreation.
9. Support and encourage the transition from conventional to sustainable and ultimately to regenerative agriculture.

Map 1. Chicago Wilderness Green Vision (7.8 million acres)



Map 2. Illinois portion of Chicago Wilderness (CW-IL, 4.8 million acres)



Map 3. Resilient Lands and Corridors in Illinois (Courtesy of [The Nature Conservancy](#))



Table 1. 30x30 Goals in Chicago Wilderness – Illinois

Landscape Type	Chicago Wilderness (million acres)	Illinois portion of CW (million acres)	CW-IL 30% (million acres)	Rough 30x30 goal
Conservation lands & waters	0.492	0.312	0.0936	93,600 acres under active restoration and management
Park lands (City parks)	0.087	0.063	0.0189	18,900 acres under improved management for plants, wildlife, people
Agricultural lands	4.52	2.69	0.807	807,000 million acres in sustainable or regenerative agriculture
Additional open space	0.751	0.185	0.0555	55,500 acres added to conservation lands + waters
Built landscapes	2.12	1.52	0.456	456,000 acres in green infrastructure (backyards, ROW, green roofs, other)
Chicago Wilderness Total	7.97	4.77	1.431	1.43 million acres in healthy conditions for people & the rest of nature

Appendix VII: Natural Lands and Waters Listening Session

Presentations

IDNR Staff: Natural Land and Water Programs

- Todd Strole of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission gave a presentation on several of IDNR’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 land 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 they’re 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 programs 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 leasing has added more acres in the past 10 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 10 years, across 47 counties, at a cost of \$1.7 million annually.
 - To expand this, we 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 invasive 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 eight 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 for community parks, but can be for more natural areas.
 - And next year will see the biggest round in years, over \$50 million.
- 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.

Jason Bleich: USFWS Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program

- Jason Bleich, a private lands biologist for USFWS, presented on the Partners for Fish & 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 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.

IDOT Staff: Right of Way Conservation Programs

- Erin Holmes, roadside management resource specialist with the Illinois Department of Transportation, 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 to increase monarch habitat and allow for more eggs to be laid with fewer predators.
 - Never mowing more than a third of the right of way at a time to preserve habitat and limiting the use of herbicides allow creation of more pollinator habitat.
 - Establishing registered monarch stations and working with IDNR to distribute milkweed seeds.
 - IDOT operates more than 400,000 acres of land at any one point, and tries to use an Integrated Vegetation Management approach on it.
 - Includes prescribed burns, mowing weeds, control, restoration projects, selective herbicides.
 - Adapted to the needs of the specific area with dedicated 3 to 5 year plans.
 - They focus these efforts not on the immediate shoulder of the road, but the area beyond that within the right of way.
 - And areas within this that are priority areas for mowing are rotated on a four-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 one-third 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 memorandum of understanding.
 - 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.

Public Comments (spoken)

Domenico D'Alessandro, 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 Rockford 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 United States 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 Service, 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 million milkweed stems added by 2038.
 - Have received 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, Retired Lake Manager

- 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 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 the Shawnee National Forest is transferred from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to the U.S. Department of Interior as a national park.
 - Agriculture is focused on producing products, not protecting land.
 - Encourage you to sign the petition.

Olivia Dorothy, American Rivers

- Continue to be disappointed 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 we do land conservation in flood plains, often see levies that disconnect the river from the flood plain.

Chat Discussion

Shawnee National Forest

- Sam Stearns

- An essential component of combatting climate change is PROFORESTATION: letting existing forests stand rather than cutting them down. We must at least do this on public lands. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and a growing body of independent science (not the pseudoscience funded by the timber industry) are clear that more carbon is sequestered in both trees and, crucially, forest soil in existing standing forests than any other forest management practice. For that reason, a large number of people, including former Illinois state senator/U.S. congressman/gubernatorial candidate Glenn Poshard, support a proposal to make the Shawnee National Forest (Department of Agriculture) the Shawnee National Park and Climate Change Preserve (under the Department of Interior). An abbreviated version of this proposal is available, as well as a more fully fleshed one is available for anyone interested from www.shawneeforestdefense.info
- For recent information regarding the failure of Shawnee National Forest and IDNR “restoration projects,” please see www.fobss.org or contact me for a personal ground truthing tour at bellsmithsprings@hotmail.com
- Samantha Chavez
 - Question for Todd Strole: Do “Forestry Management Plans” to participate in the Forestry Cost Share program emphasize conservation over timber production? What data has been collected on the Forestry Cost Share program to ensure its success?
- Sam Stearns
 - Am also interested in the answer to Samantha’s question. In our Shawnee National Forest area, timber production logging is euphemistically disguised as “ecological restoration,” “wildlife habitat enhancement,” “oak regeneration,” and other corporate greenwashing terms.
- Michael Lynch
 - To Samantha and Sam’s questions on the Forestry Program, we do not have someone from the program on the call, but I can say that the cost-share program specifically is targeted at promoting conservation value on land that is primarily used for timber production, rather than to divert land away from timber production.
- Samantha Chavez
 - Michael, it is my understanding that there is little to no compliance of management in this program, nor are the IDNR foresters qualified to make conservation decisions outside timber production.

Conserved Land Definition

- Kyle Rorah
 - Is anyone seeing guidance from the federal government about what constitutes “conserved land” for the purposes of the 30 by 30 initiative?
- Ellicia Sanchez
 - Hello Kyle, Biden admin is creating a conservation atlas that will track and monitor conserved lands: <https://www.doi.gov/pressreleases/biden-harris-administration-invites-public-comment-development-new-conservation-stewardship-tool>

Written Comments

Domenico D'Alessandro, Regenerative Design Consultant

I would like to speak about the current crisis at the Chicago Rockford International Airport with the ongoing air cargo expansion. This situation contains all the challenges listed in the “Thirty by Thirty Act.”

This expansion will obliterate an 8,000-year-old remnant, extremely rare dry hill prairie of which only 18 acres are left in all of Illinois. If the expansion is allowed according to the airport authority’s outdated plan, we will also lose 400 to 500 acres of A2 flood plain at the confluence of the Kishwaukee and Rock Rivers. This acreage will need to be buried under an average 30-foot depth of fill to meet the elevation of existing runways and facilities, at great cost to the public that may surpass one million dollars per acre. If this expansion is allowed to proceed there will be significant negative impacts on the biotic communities in the river corridor.

Alternatives are possible, one alternative I propose will save all the flood plain and will deliver to Illinois a true state-of-the-art air cargo center that can be built using the best biophilic design criteria to meet the challenges faced with the exponentially rising climate crisis. It will be a key addition to the existing protected parklands along the Kishwaukee River. We can make the Kishwaukee River one of the highest quality biotic communities in the State. We will be saving cultural legacy including Indigenous heritage.

There is a way to obtain the needed economic stimulus for the region and be good stewards of the land by restoring more than one thousand acres of flood plain that will create a contiguous biological transect from aquatic to dry hill prairie communities.

We have been granted another short reprieve to save this important ecosystem and corridor, I ask that we must all pitch in so that a terrible ecocide plan is not allowed to come to fruition.

Governor J.B. Pritzker can inaugurate this program with a truly landmark project that will set the stage for others in the future, one we could all be proud of.

...

I need to expand on my previous e-mail. The flood plain the airport authority's expansion plan will destroy is mostly used as agricultural land. There is the dilemma of also dealing with abusive agricultural practices in flood plains causing a negative impact on biotic ecosystems. When economic growth enters the picture things get complicated and hard choices need to be made. Much of our natural ecosystems have been replaced by agriculture, then the urban layer is replacing agricultural land, and the urban residential layer is coming under pressure by the industrial and commerce layers. We have to juggle all layers to figure out the best balance.

In my alternative concept proposal, I have given priority to environmental protection because the biggest crisis we now face is climate change and unless we save the natural systems we will also lose agricultural lands. The two are linked, historically we have seen them in opposition, especially once we adopted industrial agricultural practices.

The airport authority's expansion will also destroy important cultural heritage including Indigenous use of the land.

Bob Fisher, Bird Conservation Network

Our topic would focus on the Trends Analysis covering 22 years (1999 through 2020) of IL breeding bird species that inhabit the natural areas within the largely urban/suburban NE portion of Illinois.

<https://www.bcnbirds.org/trends21/trends.html>

<https://www.bcnbirds.org/trends21/concern.html>

These links reflect a recently completed comprehensive statistical analysis of the very large database compiled over that period by 200+ volunteer bird monitors. This analysis led to the development of various hypotheses for natural land management practices, after extensive consultation with a diverse group of knowledgeable scientists with expertise on our IL breeding birds, and their needs.

Our native birds are keystone species (the 'canaries in the coal mine'), a critical indicator of ecosystem health. We think this topic fits well into the 30 by 30 program, and provides a model for programs across the state.

Our presentation would highlight population trends of our native breeding birds, those that are doing well, and those not doing well (with some thoughts on why) against the backdrop of the natural habitat types they occupy, and what might be best practices for maintaining and improving those habitats. 15-20 minutes would serve for a highlighted/condensed overview. And would happily answer questions and provide follow up.

The Bird Conservation Network (BCN), is a coalition of 21 organizations (with an aggregate membership of 35,000+ bird/wildlife conservation advocates) dedicated to the conservation of birds and the habitats they need to survive and prosper. BCN recently published:

Breeding Birds Trends in the Chicago Region – 1999-2020

This document/analysis BCN contends is specifically relevant to the aims of the 30 by 30 initiative. Birds are truly the “canaries in the coal mine,” visual, identifiable indicators of the health of our natural lands.

The BCN *Trends* report contains bird population trends over a 22-year period, one of the largest regional datasets in the country. Data was collected across the 6 county Chicago metro area in NE Illinois, aka Chicago Wilderness, by 200+ citizen science monitors, according to strict protocols. Statistical analysis produced a resource to aid natural land managers in measuring the results of management techniques, and changing those techniques when the data points the way. And the *Trends* data collection and analysis project continues!

The *Trends* analysis also led to the development of various hypotheses for natural land management practices, based on extensive consultation with a diverse group of knowledgeable scientists with expertise on Illinois breeding bird species and their needs. We encourage you to tap into the full report and narrative here: <https://www.bcnbirds.org/trends21/trends.html>

BCN believes the *Trends* can be a continuing part of the toolkit for the 30 by 30 program. Meeting the 30 by 30 goal is just a first step! The environmental community must prioritize follow-up:

- Establish a robust public education program, valuing natural lands and the wildlife that inhabit them, not just for their own sake, but as a critical component in human health and prosperity, in the face of global climate change.
- Promote and support active/effective management of Illinois' natural areas, built around a continuously updated best management practices database.
- Expand the breadth of the definition of what we classify as natural areas – include filter strips, conservation easements, Smart Wetlands in farm fields (a TWI innovation), 'gentle' agriculture (example; delayed mowing of hayfields), converting closed landfills to prairie habitat, etc.
- Collaborate to generate the funding needed for those management and maintenance activities, so our native species, both flora and fauna, flourish in this time of climate and land use changes.

BCN is ready to share the *Trends* breeding bird data and management recommendations database to support the goal of 30 by 30 and we invite your inquiries. For more information, contact media@bcnbirds.org

Sam Stearns, Friends of Bell Smith Prairie

An essential component of combatting climate change is PROFORESTATION: letting existing forests stand rather than cutting them down. We must at least do this on public lands. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and a growing body of independent science (not the pseudoscience funded by the timber industry) are clear that more carbon is sequestered in both trees and, crucially, forest soil in existing standing forests than any other forest management practice.

For that reason, a large number of people, including former Illinois State Senator / U. S. Congressman / Gubernatorial Candidate Glenn Poshard, support a proposal to make the Shawnee National Forest (Department of Agriculture) the Shawnee National Park and Climate Change Preserve (under the Department of Interior).

An abbreviated version of this proposal is Attached. A more fully fleshed one is available for anyone interested from: www.shawneeforestdefense.info

The Shawnee National Forest in Southern Illinois is a gem that has remained a best kept secret for far too long, and unfortunately, to its detriment. Local residents, governments and governmental agencies have often undervalued and underestimated the region's impressive natural features. A new idea has been introduced, to change the designation of the Shawnee from that of a national forest to a national park. Is the concept of creating the Shawnee National Park and Climate Preserve out of the existing federal land even realistic or is the proposition merely an impractical notion?

Considering the ever-present and grim reminders of climate change, the ugly face of commercial logging has once again returned to the Shawnee National Forest. As trees continue to fall how will the public respond? Will litigation, protests and armed guards befall the Shawnee, as in the past?

A drastic shift away from natural resource exploitation, toward recreation and more national recognition of the Shawnee is not only feasible, but long overdue. The current climate change emergency facing our planet and humanity is demanding significant societal adjustments. Science shows us that preserving and truly restoring mature, undisturbed forests are some of the most efficient ways to sequester and store carbon. The finest example of these forests in Illinois are on the Shawnee and the best way to ensure the forest remains undisturbed is to designate it as a National Park and Climate Preserve.

In the last twenty to thirty years, various cottage industries have emerged in Southern Illinois that both rely on and cater to tourism. Businesses, from wineries to microbreweries, bed & breakfasts to cabin rentals, farmers markets and orchards to unique eateries that help sustain the local economy, are scattered throughout the region's picturesque small towns and the forested hills and valleys. Foot and equestrian trails provide access to some of the nation's most scenic natural locales, including wilderness areas. Outfitters and guides for rock climbing, ziplining, biking, horseback riding, hiking, and birdwatching in the region are all demanding an agency that can highlight our natural treasures while responsibly managing visitor use.

The proximity of the Shawnee to relatively large population centers and the notable absence of national parks in the central United States is an important consideration as well. Public demand in this region of the country is poised to readily welcome and utilize a new, centrally located national park, and the Shawnee is the perfect candidate. The Shawnee needs an agency with more of a commitment to protecting the natural and cultural heritage resources, a high degree of public confidence and a history of responsible recreation development. A new national park will attract more tourists to the region which will help to fill more rooms and cabins as well as pack the area's eateries and shops. Park visitors will flock to the nearby wineries, breweries, and distilleries in the area, as well. Bird watchers, hikers, rock climbers, campers, bicyclists, equestrians, boaters, kayakers, canoeists, and the like will also look to local businesses for shopping and dining, not to mention the growing outfitting and guiding services now being offered throughout the Shawnee. The forest should be a mecca for nature loving, outdoor enthusiasts.

Under this scenario, jobs will flourish over the long run because the natural resources that form the foundation of the more sustainable, tourism economy will remain intact. Many US Dept of Ag Forest Service (USFS) employees who wish to remain in southern Illinois will be eligible for similar National Park Service (NPS) positions as just transitions are available and often encouraged between federal land management agencies. National Preserves also allow for uses such as hunting, trapping, boating, fishing, and dispersed camping. Areas where such ongoing recreational use regularly takes place on the Shawnee can continue under NPS oversight, as part of the Climate Preserve.

US Department of Agriculture Forest Service → US Department of Interior Park Service

- National Parks are “America’s Best Idea,” yet none exist in Illinois, and few exist in the central US.
 - The Shawnee is within a day’s drive from highly populated metropolitan areas such as Chicago, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Louisville, Memphis, Nashville and Cincinnati.
 - People are using the National Parks now more than ever and many are overcrowded.
- The Shawnee is nationally significant and meets National Park System standards:

- One of the most biodiverse areas in the entire nation
- Two of the largest rivers in the US border the Shawnee
- Three designated Geological Areas
- Four National Park Service (NPS) National Natural Landmarks and a NPS National Historic Trail
- Five Physiographic Natural Divisions collide in this limited geographic area
- Six candidate Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Seven designated Wilderness Areas
- Vistas abound, from Little Grand Canyon and Inspiration Point at LaRue Pine Hills to High Knob and Garden of the Gods
- Stunning scenery and recreational opportunities in such places as Bell Smith Springs, Lusk Creek Canyon, Hutchins Creek, Burden Falls, Pomona Natural Bridge, Grantsburg Swamp, Fountain Bluff and Rim Rock
- Nationally significant rock climbing
- Sand Cave is an Underground Railroad site located near Miller Grove, a pre-Civil War African American settlement
- At least six “stone forts” built by Indigenous peoples approx. 1,500 years ago are found on the Shawnee as well as many other significant archeological sites
- Reasons to Shift from a National Forest to a National Park:
 - Increased economic benefits for the entire Southern Illinois region
 - Greater significance for Southern Illinois - regionally and nationally
 - Climate Change... logging greatly contributes CO₂; mature forests sequester the most CO₂
 - Increased watershed protection around Kinkaid Lake, Cedar Lake, Lake of Egypt, various streams and rivers
 - The Shawnee would benefit from more suitable recreation management
 - Logging, mining and oil and gas drilling are allowed on national forests
 - Controversy and litigation often surround USDA Forest Service projects
 - More education about the uniqueness of the Shawnee is greatly needed
 - 86% of Americans view the National Park Service favorably (2019 Pew Survey)
 - The Shawnee deserves to become the 64th National Park
 - The Shawnee could become the nation’s first Climate Preserve!

To read more about the proposal to create the Shawnee National Park and Climate Preserve, and to take action to help make this proposal become reality, visit the Shawnee Forest Defense website at: <https://www.shawneeforestdefense.info>

Contact us at: shawneeforestdefense@gmail.com

[Robert Hughes, Shawnee Natural Area Guardians](#)

I am traveling and unable to participate in today’s listening session. I am Robert Hughes, President of Shawnee Natural Area Guardians. I would like to submit a few comments.

- Only 13% of Illinois is wooded and about 20% is paved in some way. Our Parks are precious to us, the Illinois taxpayers, and crucial to the environmental health of the entire planet.
- There is so much good, vetted peer review science on how important woods/forests are for environmental health I will not belabor it. It is scientific fact.

- The logging of Trail of Tears Park was heart rending; it was abomination. You, IDNR, work for the people of Illinois, not logging and oil companies.
- Please make sure that in future plans Logging and any commercial use is banned on any and all Illinois public lands. Again, we are in a time where every tree counts.

John Wallace, Retired Lake Manager

Ladies & Gentlemen,

I am writing to request a slot to address the 3rd Illinois 30 X 30 Listening Session: Natural Areas, on March 31st. I am retired from the City of Carbondale where I served as Manager for Cedar Lake, a beautiful water source and recreation reservoir in Jackson County. I currently reside in Pope County.

I wish to speak to the Task Force regarding my pursuit of a bold proposal for the State Legislature and the Governor to consider. My statement revolves around important protection for public land in Illinois, which contains at least 90 Illinois Natural Areas Inventory Sites, four National Natural Landmarks, and the largest single ownership of land in the state, the 289,000 acre Shawnee National Forest.

I hope to persuade a recommendation by the Task Force, to the Legislature and Governor, in support of passing a Resolution requesting the Illinois US Congressional Delegation introduce and support legislation to transfer the Shawnee National Forest out of the US Dept. of Agriculture Forest Service and into the US Dept. of Interior Park Service to create the Shawnee National Park and Climate Preserve. This bold initiative represents a relatively simple undertaking involving minimal expense that would greatly assist the Task Force in achieving the Illinois 30 by 30 Initiative. The proposal would create the first national park in the state and the nation's first Climate Preserve!

I have attached a short version of the proposal, "A New Vision - Shawnee National Park." I am happy to provide a bibliography and photographs in support of this vision and its contained statements. I have a ten-page proposal as well, provided the Task Force desires a more thorough and in-depth version.

The Shawnee National Forest is not protected from logging, from oil and gas drilling, nor from mining. The US Forest Service currently has plans underway to log an additional 6,000 to 7,000 acres on the forest via *clearcut-style*, shelterwood timber harvesting. In fact, more than 2,000 acres of the agency's proposed commercial logging projects are located within a sensitive watershed.

I thereby respectfully request participation in the upcoming listening session. Should the Task Force desire more information or have questions for me, please do not hesitate to contact me at this email address or at 618/534-0939 voice or text.

...

The Shawnee National Park and Climate Preserve
A New Vision for the Future that Best Serves the Public Good

The Shawnee National Forest is a treasure that has been a best kept secret for too long, and unfortunately, to its detriment. Local residents, governments and government agencies have often undervalued and underestimated the forest's impressive natural features. A different approach has been suggested for the Shawnee. Is the concept of creating the Shawnee National Park and Climate Preserve out of the existing national forest land even realistic or is the proposition merely an impractical notion?

Unfortunately, the ugly face of commercial logging has once again returned to the Shawnee National Forest. Studies now show that logging greatly contributes to the nation's release of climate changing carbon dioxide. Thousands of acres of Shawnee National Forest land are slated for commercial logging. Will our public carbon sink forest continue to fall, reverting into carbon sources? Will litigation, protests and armed guards befall the Shawnee, as in the past?

A drastic shift away from natural resource exploitation, toward recreation and more national recognition of the Shawnee is not only feasible, it is long overdue. The current climate change emergency facing our planet and humanity is demanding dramatic societal alterations. Recent, scientific studies reveal that the most efficient and effective means of carbon sequestration and storage on land, comes from mature, wild forests. Intact eastern forests effectively mitigate the impacts of climate change. The finest example of mature forests and the largest, single ownership of forested, wild land in Illinois, is on the Shawnee.

The best way to accomplish the mission of the Illinois 30 by 30 Conservation Task Force of establishing a truly bold goal for protecting the natural lands and waters of Illinois is to advise the Governor and the General Assembly to recommend to our US Congressional Delegation to support legislation to transfer the Shawnee National Forest out of the US Department of Agriculture's Forest Service (USFS) oversight and into the US Department of Interior's Park Service (NPS) to designate this gem as the Shawnee National Park and Climate Preserve.

The proximity of the Shawnee to relatively large population centers and the notable absence of national parks in the central United States, is an important consideration as well. Public demand in the state and this region of the country is poised to readily welcome and utilize a new, centrally located national park, and the Shawnee's 289,000 acres is the perfect candidate.

In the last twenty to thirty years, various cottage industries have emerged in Southernmost Illinois that both rely on and cater to tourism. Businesses, from wineries to microbreweries, bed & breakfasts to cabin rentals, farmers markets and orchards to unique eateries that help reduce the area's carbon footprint and sustain the local economy, are scattered throughout the region's picturesque small towns and the forested hills and valleys

Logging, mining, oil and gas drilling, all of which are permitted on national forests contribute greatly to climate change and provide few local jobs. Under the national park and preserve scenario, more recreationists will be attracted to the area, jobs will flourish over the long run because the natural resources that form the foundation of the region and the more sustainable, tourism-based economy will remain intact.

There are currently 21 National Preserves which are commonly associated with national parks but allow for more uses such as sport hunting, trapping and dispersed camping, that may not be permitted in parks. Areas where such ongoing recreational use regularly takes place on the Shawnee

can continue under NPS oversight, as part of the National Preserve. The Shawnee should be the nation's 64th National Park and more importantly **the first National Climate Preserve!**

The IPCC's *Climate Change 2022, Sixth Report, Summary for Policymakers* made the necessity we face clear.

“Safeguarding biodiversity and ecosystems is fundamental to climate resilient development, ... Recent analyses, drawing on a range of lines of evidence, suggest that maintaining the resilience of biodiversity and ecosystem services at a global scale depends on effective and equitable conservation of approximately 30% to 50% of Earth's land, freshwater and ocean areas, including currently near-natural ecosystems (*high confidence*).” (IPCC 2022 Report, SPM.D.4, pg. 34)

Coupled with the ongoing, deplorable impacts from Climate Change, a trend toward additional climate preserves is sure to grip the nation. A bold goal for the state's 30 X 30 Task Force should be to recommend establishing the Nation's First Climate Preserve in Illinois!

- **The Shawnee is nationally significant and meets National Park System standards.**
 - One of the most biodiverse areas in the entire nation
 - Two of the largest rivers in the US border the Shawnee
 - Three designated Geological Areas are found here
 - Four National Park Service (NPS) National Natural Landmarks and a NPS National Historic Trail
 - Five Physiographic Natural Divisions collide in this limited geographic area
 - Six candidates Wild and Scenic Rivers
 - Seven designated Wilderness Areas
 - Vistas abound, from Little Grand Canyon and Inspiration Point at LaRue Pine Hills to High Knob and Garden of the Gods
 - Stunning scenery and recreational opportunities in such places as Bell Smith Springs, Lusk Creek Canyon, Hutchins Creek, Burden Falls, Pomona Natural Bridge, Grantsburg Swamp, Fountain Bluff and Rim Rock
 - Nationally significant rock climbing
 - Sand Cave is an Underground Railroad site located near Miller Grove, a pre-Civil War African American settlement
 - At least six “stone forts” built by Indigenous peoples approx. 1,500 years ago are found on the Shawnee as well as many other significant archeological sites
- **Reasons to Shift from a National Forest to a National Park:**
 - Increased economic benefits for the entire Southern Illinois region
 - Greater significance for Southern Illinois - regionally and nationally
 - Climate Change... logging greatly contributes CO₂; mature forests sequester the most CO₂
 - Increased watershed protection around Kinkaid Lake, Cedar Lake, Lake of Egypt, various streams and rivers
 - The Shawnee would benefit from more suitable recreation management
 - Logging, mining and oil and gas drilling are allowed on national forests
 - Controversy and litigation often surround USDA Forest Service projects
 - More education about the uniqueness of the Shawnee is greatly needed

- 86% of Americans view the National Park Service favorably (2019 Pew Survey)
- **The Shawnee deserves to become the 64th National Park**
- **The Shawnee could become *the nation's first Climate Preserve!***

Kim Erndt-Pitcher, Prairie Rivers Network

Prairie Rivers Network (PRN) is a statewide conservation organization whose mission is to protect water, heal land, and inspire change. We use science and collective action to protect and restore the health of lands and waters throughout the state. We appreciate this opportunity to provide input on the 30 x 30 strategy to protect and restore critical land and water resources for the people and wildlife of Illinois.

Climate change is already impacting Illinois' land and water resources. It is critical that the state's 30 x 30 goals address how to best manage and protect those resources and adapt to a changing world. The proper care and management of these resources is a critical aspect of mitigating climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Our native ecosystems are under a tremendous amount of pressure from the threats of pollution, habitat loss, invasive species, disease, and climatic stressors. We feel strongly that the protection of high-quality habitat and the habitat of rare, threatened, and endangered species should be maintained as a priority for the state. The 30 x 30 plan should set ambitious goals. Below we provide a few ideas on how Illinois can meet our 30 x 30 goals.

Funding for state agencies.

In order to meet our 30 x 30 goals, we need:

1. Significant increases in dedicated funding for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, and the Illinois Department of Agriculture. These agencies serve many critical roles, specifically, they are responsible for managing and maintaining public lands, evaluating and permitting projects that impact environmental health and drinking water resources, assisting landowners in the management of their land, and enforcing regulations that protect the people, wildlife, and natural resources of Illinois. Without proper funding and an increase in qualified and committed staff within these agencies to address the ever-growing demands put upon them, we will not reach 30 x 30 goals and the natural resources we currently have cannot be properly protected.
2. The IDNR also needs increased funding for the purpose of purchasing and protecting land that is critical for the protection of biodiversity.
3. Illinois needs Increased funding to assist in the protection of wetlands, stream corridors, water supply watersheds, and to purchase large tracts of land for
4. river-floodplain connection projects that protect wildlife habitat, water quality, and increase flood resilience.

Management of State-Owned Lands

1. State-owned lands provide unique opportunities to improve habitat that is already protected and under management.

2. We encourage the state to continue to protect and preserve lands of high ecological quality (e.g., INAI and INPC sites) in accordance with the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan.
3. We encourage the state to restore and maintain lands of lesser ecological quality to promote healthy and diverse ecosystems thus maximizing climate change resilience.
4. Illinois needs dedicated funding for easement programs that allow landowners to place priority and/or high quality areas of land under permanent protection from development.
5. The impact of climate change on the quality and condition of state-owned natural areas and the species of plants and animals that depend on them should be considered in the management of all public lands.
6. In order to address anticipated shifts in species range and habitat availability, the state should focus on the expansion and connectivity of wildlife habitat in priority landscapes (e.g., Middle Illinois River, Upper Mississippi River COA).
7. Discourage high-impact uses that diminish or degrade existing high-quality habitats (e.g., Kickapoo mountain bike trail expansion).

Private lands

1. Private landowners in both rural settings located in small townships and urban settings in large cities all have the potential to increase native habitat for invertebrates, birds, and other wildlife.
2. Nationwide programs such as the National Wildlife Federation's Certified Wildlife Habitat Program and Mayors' Monarch Pledge, and small regional and local groups that are supportive of "greening" up communities with the use of native herbaceous plants and trees can help protect biodiversity, mitigate climate change, and improve opportunities for all people to enjoy and benefit from regular contact with nature.
3. Partnerships between state and federal agencies, NGOs, communities, and private landowners have proven to be highly effective. Partnerships such as these should be encouraged and sought after more frequently.

Addressing Agricultural Pollution at a Landscape Scale

1. The management practices used on the majority of agricultural lands across the state do not adequately protect water resources and build soil health. Many farmers and scientists agree that the current system is not sustainable, and the agricultural community will eventually need to shift their practices to adapt to climate change, changes in water availability, degraded soil health, environmental degradation, and the public's increased demand for healthy foods. Conservation programs such as CREP, CRP, EQIP, etc. that piece together practices for farmers are not enough to address current complex agro-ecological problems. Additionally, each year, farmers have been turned away from these programs because there simply is not enough funding to support all of the interests.
2. We need increased funding for conservation programs. Many conservation and agricultural groups, including Prairie Rivers Network, strive to increase funding through these programs through the Farm Bill. These efforts need to be increased and amplified to illustrate the need for such programs on the landscape.
3. Illinois needs an innovative and comprehensive approach to helping farmers rebuild resiliency on their land. Regenerative agricultural practices are based on outcomes that build healthy soil, protect water resources, greatly reduce the need for synthetic inputs

such as fertilizers and pesticides, and they increase the overall health of the agro-ecosystem and help mitigate climate change. We desperately need long-term funding for well-trained technical service providers that specialize in helping farmers utilize integrated pest management practices and understand and implement the best regenerative practices for their farm in order to protect water quality, build healthy soil, and protect biodiversity. These efforts could greatly amplify the efforts being made by the Natural Resource Conservation Service, Farm Service Agency, and Soil and Water Conservation District staff.

State-Owned Agricultural Lands

1. We commend the steps that the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) has taken to improve the health of the agricultural lands they manage. The steps the IDNR is taking are a strong move in the right direction. The department has the opportunity to serve as an example of what is possible and should continue to set high standards for improving the health of agricultural areas and protecting the natural resources that are surrounded by them.
2. We encourage the department to continue to improve the working relationships with their tenants and the agreements made with them in order to further protect water resources and the critical areas of wildlife habitat the state manages.
3. We encourage the department to eliminate the use of any treated seeds on state-owned land that is leased for agricultural use. Many treated seeds are coated with neonicotinoid pesticides that contain active and inert ingredients that have proven harmful to aquatic and terrestrial life. These pesticides are water-soluble, persistent, and systemic, all of which contribute to the problems they can cause for water quality and wildlife.
4. We recognize the steps the Department has made to reduce the use of synthetic nitrogen, herbicides, and other synthetic inputs on leased lands. We encourage the department to continue to work closely with tenants so that they may be able to move toward more regenerative practices and therefore reduce the need for synthetic inputs.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on how we can achieve the goal of 30 x 30.
Sincerely,



Kim Erndt-Pitcher
Habitat and Agriculture Programs Specialist Prairie Rivers Network

Dear Illinois 30x30 Task Force,

On behalf of Project Coyote, in the below comments hereby submitted to the information gathering Task Force created pursuant to Illinois House Bill 3928, we highlight the critical need for both addressing landscape connectivity and coexistence between humans and wild lives within the context of any anticipated Illinois 30x30 initiative. Based on the scientific literature on the topics, failure to consider connectivity and coexistence will certainly complicate progress towards the plan's mission of creating an equitable, biodiverse and climate resilient Illinois.

Connectivity

There is robust evidence indicating protected areas ('cores'), when adequately placed and enforced, help increase biodiversity locally, and that they are most effective when they minimize human-dominated land uses⁴⁵. However, most conservation plans fail to address the connectivity component that is integral to the resiliency of cores and adjacent landscapes⁴⁶.

Ecological connectivity can be defined as the feasible movement of species and circulation of ecological processes across a landscape⁴⁷. In human-dominated systems, such as much of Illinois, including the Chicago Wilderness Area, cores without connectivity via wildlife corridors are doomed to failure due largely to restrictions in movement that limit species' numbers, distribution and genetic variability. Connectivity is critical for species with large habitat requirements because it allows them to achieve natural, flourishing populations through unrestricted genetic dispersal. In part, genetic dispersal increases the resilience of species to changing environmental conditions (i.e., increases their adaptability to climate change).

Connectivity is also indispensable for migratory species, such as the monarch butterfly, that depend on migration corridors that connect stopover points. In fact, the protection of small habitat patches has been proven to disproportionately contribute to dispersal, providing connectivity that proves indispensable for animals and plants, including those dependent on native grasslands⁴⁸.

When adequately protected, rivers and their associated floodplains can provide a variety of species with essential corridors across the Midwest⁴⁹. Such evidence suggests connectivity, at multiple scales, should be a priority in landscape conservation. Lastly, urban corridors can decrease negative human-wildlife interactions (such as collisions), and also allow for more equitable access to nature, with an

⁴⁵ Gray CL, Hill SLL, Newbold T, Hudson LN, Boirger L, Contu S, et al. Local biodiversity is higher inside than outside terrestrial protected areas worldwide. *Nat Commun.* 2016;7(May).

⁴⁶ Dinerstein E, Joshi AR, Vynne C, Lee ATL, Pharand-Deschênes F, França M, et al. A "global safety net" to reverse biodiversity loss and stabilize earth's climate. *Sci Adv.* 2020;6(36):1–14

⁴⁷ Hilty J, Worboys GL, Keeley A, Woodley S, Lausche BJ, Locke H, et al. Guidelines for conserving connectivity through ecological networks and corridors. *Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No. 30.* Gland, Switzerland; 2020.

⁴⁸ Wimberly MC, Narem DM, Bauman PJ, Carlson BT, Ahlering MA. Grassland connectivity in fragmented agricultural landscapes of the north-central United States. *Biol Conserv [Internet].* 2018;217(June 2017):121–30. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.biocon.2017.10.031>

⁴⁹ See Ahlering MA, Cornett M, Blann K, White M, Lenhart C, Dixon C, et al. A conservation science agenda for a changing Upper Midwest and Great Plains, United States. *Conserv Sci Pract.* 2020;2(8):1–10. Also, Schottler, S. P., Ulrich, J., Belmont, P., Moore, R., Lauer, J. W., Engstrom, D. R., & Almendinger, J. E. (2014). Twentieth century agricultural drainage creates more erosive rivers. *Hydrological Processes*, 28, 1951–1961.

emphasis on historically underserved communities of color (e.g., the Burham Wildlife Corridor)⁵⁰. Below, we provide some useful resources on diverse forms of policy and legislation to enhance connectivity (e.g., the Wildlife Corridors Act).

Coexistence

Many species require not only protection of cores and corridors, but also reduction of human activities around them, and education on coexistence to mitigate negative interactions and impacts for both humans and wildlife.⁵¹ Functionally, effective cores and corridors require protection from harm. Accordingly, there's a critical need to correct the current lack of protection for mesopredators such as bobcats and coyotes, which often leads to cruel and indiscriminate killing practices such as wildlife killing contests, trapping, and poaching of protected species. Correcting for such lack of protections will mitigate the root causes of declines in predator populations, and resulting irruptions in their prey populations.

Predators such as bobcats, coyotes, bears, cougars and wolves play vital roles in maintaining resilient ecosystems through their top-down regulatory effects on prey populations, and indirect effects that reverberate throughout the trophic web. For example, in both urban and rural ecosystems, coyotes directly regulate the abundance of small rodents including rats, gophers, rabbits and insects, and indirectly increase the diversity of songbirds by regulating the latter's predators⁵². Hence, coyote (or bobcat, or cougar) killing can precipitate incredibly harmful and damaging ecological chain reactions while also increasing conflicts. Instead of engaging in cruel and damaging practices, we suggest the state of Illinois focus on prohibiting the cruel, indiscriminate killing of wildlife, alongside the promotion of least harmful and non-lethal interventions that have been proven functionally effective at mitigating negative interactions and promoting care for wildlife.

Alongside cores and connectivity, coexistence provides the third essential component allowing for ecological resilience, rather than the protection of scenic landscapes that are devoid of most biodiversity and extremely vulnerable to climate change. Among other changes, we suggest the promotion of coexistence will also require a change from consumptive, harmful uses to non-consumptive ones such as wildlife watching and nature-based tourism which can align the wellbeing of humans and nonhumans.

The health and wellbeing of Illinois and Midwestern ecosystems will hinge in large part on the integration of cores, connectivity and coexistence policies and initiatives with adjacent states. An ideal, regional goal to work towards would be to connect larger core areas (e.g., the Driftless Region, the Shawnee National Forest, the Ozarks) with smaller ones across the Midwest through corridors. Coupled with the foregrounding of coexistence and respect for wildlife, such a network will

⁵⁰ 6 The Center for Growth and Opportunity at Utah State University. "Urban conservation is key to achieving Biden's 30x30 initiative". Jul 05, 2021, retrieved from <https://www.thecgo.org/benchmark/urban-conservation-is-key-to-achieving-bidens-30x30-initiative/>

⁵¹ See Dietsch AM, Slagle KM, Baruch-Mordo S, Breck SW, Ciarniello LM. Education is not a panacea for reducing human-black bear conflicts. *Ecol Modell.* 2018;367:10–2. Also, Flores-Morales M, Vázquez J, Bautista A, Rodríguez-Martínez L, Monroy-Vilchis O. Response of two sympatric carnivores to human disturbances of their habitat: the bobcat and coyote. *Mammal Res.* 2019;64(1):53–62.

⁵² Crooks KR, Soulé ME. Mesopredator release and avifaunal extinctions in a fragmented system. *Nature* [Internet]. 1999 Aug 5;400:563. Available from: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/23028>. Also, Kays R, Costello R, Forrester T, Baker MC, Parsons AW, Kalies L, et al. Cats are rare where coyotes roam. *J Mammal.* 2015;96(5):981–7. And, Gehrt SD, Wilson EC, Brown JL, Anchor C. Population Ecology of Free-Roaming Cats and Interference Competition by Coyotes in Urban Parks. *PLoS One.* 2013;8(9):1–11.

undoubtedly provide increased species movement and higher ecological resilience, both of which are indispensable to retain biodiversity in the face of climate change.

Thank you for considering the above comments. We would be happy to contribute additional resources and scientific literature as requested. We look forward to their integration within the Illinois 30x30 initiative.

Resources:

Resources:

- [Project Coyote](#) (coexistence)
 - [Ending Wildlife Killing Contests](#)
- [Crushing Cruelty: Animal Trapping in the United States](#) (2021, Born Free)
- [Rewilding the Heartland](#) strategy for reconnecting landscapes across the Midwest; features maps with important attributes, such as human footprint, land cover and flyway regions
 - [BeWildReWild](#) land protection interactive map for the Mississippi River Basin
- [Global Safety Net 1.0](#) - “The first global-scale analysis of land areas requiring protection to solve the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change, upholding and strengthening Indigenous land rights”
- [Conservation Corridor](#) - provides up-to-date findings from science that will inform applied conservation. We will highlight new innovations in applied conservation, with the goal of guiding the direction of applied science toward management needs.
 - [Article](#) on tools available for mapping
- [Wildlife Corridors Conservation Act](#) - Dedicates \$50 million per year to a Wildlife Movement Grant Program that will incentivize the state and tribal agencies and interested private landowners to improve habitat connectivity on non-federal lands
- [New Mexico DRAFT Wildlife Corridors Action Plan](#)
- [USDA Highway Crossing Structures for Wildlife: Opportunities for Improving Driver and Animal Safety](#)

Sincerely,

Kelly Borgmann
Coexistence Coordinator
Project Coyote & The Rewilding Institute

Francisco J. Santiago-Ávila
Science & Conservation Manager
Project Coyote & The Rewilding Institute

Executive Summary

Conservation Land Trusts are private, 501(c)3 organizations that can access private funding to leverage and match public funds to make state and federal tax dollars go farther. There are over 35 conservation land trusts in Illinois, each is governed by a board of directors, and they are collectively represented by a statewide coalition: the **Prairie State Conservation Coalition (PSCC)**; also, a 501(c)3 organization. Collectively, conservation land trusts in Illinois have saved over 200,000 acres of open space in statewide.

In this document we highlight key areas where Illinois can contribute to President Biden's 30x30 Program. We highlight programs that we know work and advocate that an increase in funding those programs is the fastest way to move forward on 30x30 goals and provide significant additional economic and social benefits to the state.

1. Conservation land trusts are a major partner in implementing the mission of IDNR and the goals of the **Illinois Wildlife Action Plan** because they are able to conduct conservation land transactions at a faster pace and at a lower cost and they draft and work with partners to pass legislation that furthers conservation goals and objectives.
2. It is time to increase the real estate transfer tax. Passed in 1989, it funds **OSLAD** and **NAAF**, two key IDNR programs for acquisition, development and land stewardship for parks and natural areas. We can do more with a modest increase.
3. Invasive species are second only to habitat conversion as the greatest threat to biodiversity. New policies regulating the introduction of invasive species and funding for eradication of newly discovered infestations is needed to meet 30x30 biodiversity goals.
4. Expanding Federal and state cost share programs is the key to the protection and stewardship of farmland and reducing their fragmentation and development.
5. Protection of natural areas needs to be a priority goal in 30x30; a strengthening of the IDNR Comprehensive Environmental Review Program is needed to reach that goal.
6. Two state agencies that need more staff and appropriations are the Illinois Nature Preserves Commissions and the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board. The INPC has 117,400-acres and only ~13 staff to do the work needed to steward and protect these sites. Additional acreage is added annually.
7. Legal protection of wetlands will go a long way to reach 30x30 goals.
8. Working to allow non-profit conservation partners to access **LAWCON** funds will bring additional capacity and private funds and resources to leverage public investments.
9. There are existing opportunities to add land to the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie (~3000-acres) and the Lost Mound Unit (~300-acres) at the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife Refuge.

1.0 Conservation Land Trusts in Illinois.

Conservation land trusts can be key partners to implement 30x30 goals in Illinois.

In 2005, the Prairie State Conservation Coalition (PSCC) formed to represent the conservation land trusts in Illinois which are located across the state. They have been purchasing Illinois Natural Area Inventory sites, dedicating, and registering them, drafting key conservation bills and working with partners to pass them. In 2016 and 2017, PSCC member organizations acquired more conservation land than did government agencies⁵³. PSCC created the **I-View** database which is the only one of its kind in the nation ([online web map](#)), the core of which is a comprehensive online, publicly available database of all of the state's protected natural lands and municipal parks – public and private, fee-owned, and conservation easements.

The I-View is now relied upon by government agencies, consultants, conservation NGOs and many others not only to understand the current state of conservation in the state, but for planning, collaboration, research, and analysis.

Working with partners, especially the **Illinois Environmental Council**, PSCC has been instrumental in providing political support to pass the following critical bills into law:

- **Recreational Liability Act**—Makes it easier for private landowners to allow recreational pursuits on their land without liability worries.
- **Illinois Prescribed Burning Act**--Made prescribed burning a property right and set the liability standard higher than strict liability. We are working to strengthen the liability issues with this act.
- **Conservation Easement Statute amendment**-- Strengthened language in the act.
- **Natural Areas Stewardship Act (NASA)**-- was drafted by PSCC in 2017 to address the burgeoning need for stewardship on Dedicated Nature Preserves and Registered Land and Water Reserves. It went live in 2021.

NASA is an IDNR grant program that provides stewardship grants to Conservation Land Trust for stewardship on dedicated Nature Preserves and Registered Land and Water Reserves. IDNR allocated \$500,000 for grants and got over \$800,000 dollars in proposals. This grant program will provide an annual source for stewardship funding from the **Natural Areas Acquisition and Stewardship Fund** via the **Real Estate Transfer Act**.

Proposed action to support 30x30.

- ❖ Increase the cap on the *Illinois Land Conservation and Stewardship Act* to \$1-million dollars.

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- ❖ Develop a land acquisition and development grant program similar to OSLAD for Conservation Land Trusts.
- ❖ Help PSCC and the Prescribed Burn Council to increase the liability standard in the Prescribed Burning Act.

2.0 Dedicated state funds and 30x30 goals.

- The Natural Areas Preservation Fund, (NAAF)
- Open Space Land and Development Fund (OSLAD)

There are over 13 dedicated conservation funds that are not General Revenue (GR) funds. These tax dollars are dedicated to specific purposes to support conservation programs. The two examples above are principal land acquisition funding sources for IDNR and Local Park and Conservation Districts. In 1989 the Illinois General Assembly created the Natural Areas Acquisition Fund (NAAF -0298) and the Open Space and Land Acquisition and Development Fund (OSLAD- 0299) and several Homeless Assistance programs, which are funded by the Real- estate Transfer Tax.

Proposed action to support 30x30 goals.

- ❖ It is time to increase the Real-estate Transfer Tax to help support the 30x30 effort and address increasing homeless issues as well.
- ❖ Refrain from the taking the easy solution of “sweeping”, “freezing”, and “borrowing” from these funds to support unrelated projects or programs.

3.0 Biodiversity and Invasive Species.

Biodiversity:

In an exhaustive report on the importance of biodiversity to the world’s economy, the Dasgupta Review points out that human demands on nature exceed its capacity to supply them therefore threatening biodiversity and putting world economies at risk⁵⁴. **The science is overwhelming and redundant --biodiversity matters; our economies depend on it--our quality of life depends on it; what is needed now are policies to address the issues science has identified⁵⁵.**

Invasive Species:

Invasive species are second only to direct habitat loss as the most important threats to the biodiversity. A recent example is the pending loss of 18 native species of ash trees (*Fraxinus* spp.) from our forests which is due to the invasive emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis*), an insect species from Asia which was detected only 19 years ago in Detroit.

⁵⁴ Dasgupta, P. 2021. The economics of biodiversity: The Dasgupta Review. London: HM treasury. 606 pp.

⁵⁵ United Nations Environment Programme (2021). Making peace with nature: A scientific blueprint to tackle the climate, biodiversity, and pollution emergencies. Nairobi. 168 pp.

Illinois is in a prime area of the country to be impacted by invasive and exotic species because of the connection to the Great Lakes, Illinois River, and serving as a road and rail transportation hub. Exotic, non-indigenous invasive species, affect the biosecurity of Illinois in three ways: (a) threatening human and animal health (b) reducing the profitability of agribusiness and (c) degrading aquatic, natural and urban ecosystems. **Exotic invasive species are reported to cause over \$140 billion of environmental damages and economic losses every year in the United States**⁵⁶. It is estimated that Illinois spent over \$90 million dollars to eradicate the long-horned beetle from Illinois and over \$9.6 million to keep carp out of Lake Michigan. The Great Lake states have spent over \$69 million to control zebra mussels; most use to protect water intake pipes at nuclear plants and water plants. In Illinois, at several state and federal agencies are involved with the permitting, regulation, and eradication of invasive exotic species in Illinois. This causes time consuming bottlenecks slowing the legal and administrative actions needed to keep new risky introductions out of Illinois.

Proposed action to support 30x30 goals.

Prevention and early intervention are the most cost-effective approaches to address the economic impact of exotic invasive species to the biosecurity of Illinois. To be successful this will require a coordinated approach in the form of a **Governor's Council on Biosecurity**. This Council will involve all levels of government, impacted industries, research institutions, local communities, natural resource agencies, not-for-profit organizations and other stakeholders. Its main purpose is to stop the spiraling costs associated with the unregulated introduction of exotic organisms. The Council will do this by developing, in partnership with stakeholders, legislative and administrative remedies to address this serious issue.

Funding source: Quarantine Bonds

New Zealand and Australia have the strictest laws in the world; reviewing their structure and functions would be a good start. But as it stands now the cost of dealing with the skyrocketing cost of escaped and naturalized exotics organisms is wholly paid for by the taxpayer. The intent of this act is to move the cost of assessment, inspection, quarantine, early detection and intervention, eradication, control, research, and litigation **away from the taxpayer and onto the purveyor**.

4.0 Agricultural Lands-CRP, CREP &WRP and ACEP-ALE and RCPP.

- ❖ Grassland birds.
- ❖ River and aquifer protection and floodplain restoration.

Private landowners' control about 95% of the land in Illinois. The vast majority of this land is in agricultural production. Farmland in Illinois is a valuable, non-renewal resource that serves important economic and environmental functions, and Illinois' farmers are essential allies in the effort to reach the 30x30 goals for biodiversity conservation and climate mitigation.

There are important opportunities to advance 30x30 goals through more use of in-field and edge-of-field conservation practices via cost share programs, better stewardship; and protecting critical

⁵⁶ Pimentel, D., S. McNAir, J. Janecka, J. Wightman, C. Simmonds, C. O'Connell, E. Wong, L. Russel, J. Zern, T. Aquino, and T. Tsomondo. 2001. Economic and environmental threats of alien plant, animal, and microbe invasions. *Agricultural, Ecosystems, & Environment* 84(1) 1-20

farmland from fragmentation and development using farmland conservation easements. **These are the key ingredients for protecting soil, restoring wildlife habitat and sustaining forest resources on private lands.**

Over 74,000 acres of land has been enrolled in permanent easements in the USDA/ state's Conservation Reserve Enhancement (CREP) program. There are over 34,000 acres of eligible land backlogged for CREP in Illinois, and the IDNR annually requests \$10 million dollars/year out of GRF (General revenue Funds) and Bond Funds to pay the state's share of CREP. They generally receive an appropriation of between \$7-8 million. The Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) can also play a key in reaching 30x30 land protection goals in Illinois.

Significant federal funding is available to purchase farmland protection easements from willing sellers. These easements ensure that farmland remains permanently available for agricultural production and protects the ecosystem services provided by that land. The 2018 Farm Bill includes \$2.25 Billion in mandatory easement funding under the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), and an additional \$1.5 Billion available for easements under the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCP). State and local dollars are needed to unlock this federal funding source for Illinois.

Grassland Birds:

The CRP program planted thousands of acres to grasslands providing habitat for declining grassland birds. The CRP program is credited with keeping the declining Henslow's Sparrow off the federal endangered species list.

River and aquifer protection and floodplain restoration:

Building upon the success of CREP, a floodplain restoration program should be developed that would focus on sustainable agriculture in floodplains along Illinois' River systems. This could provide cost-share incentives for landowners to plant alternative crops, but also reconnecting the rivers to their floodplains and helping to protect drinking water by protecting recharge areas for aquifers such as the Mahomet Aquifer in Central Illinois.

Proposed action to further 30x30 goals.

The IDNR and the Illinois Department of Agriculture should work together with stakeholders and the General Assembly to develop legislation to create a dedicated fund for the purchase of permanent conservation easements from willing sellers to protect farmland, retire highly erodible lands, and purchase high quality natural areas.

Over 28 states have adopted state-level programs, which enable access to the federal easement dollars. Funding streams for these programs are varied and include: general appropriations and bonds; farmland mitigation fees; real estate transfer taxes; sales taxes; use value assessment recapture; lottery proceeds; and greenhouse gas reduction funds.

For example, A 1-cent tax on a bushel of corn, soybean, and wheat, based on 2003 harvest data would have generated over \$22 million dollars that year for this important farmland protection and conservation program. This program would provide a **\$20 million dollars** influx of funds to help

expand an important conservation and farm program that is clearly in the public interest and releases another \$10 million dollars in general revenue to be used to address other short falls elsewhere in the state budget.

Funding source:

- ❖ Work with stakeholders to develop a funding proposal for **Kernels for Conservation**.
- ❖ Adopt a transferrable tax credit program that allows Illinois landowners to receive a dollar-for-dollar transferrable tax credit for the donation of conservation easements in priority area, such as established Illinois Ag Areas.

5.0 IDNR Comprehensive Environmental Review Program (CERP). Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI)

Completed in 1978, the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI) was the first state-wide inventory conducted in the United States. It was funded by appropriations from the Illinois General Assembly and federal money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The INAI has become one of the most profound agents of change within Illinois government not only with respect to identifying and classifying Illinois' vanishing natural heritage, but also how it drives policy, appropriations, management decisions and legislation at all levels of government.

The INAI resulted in numerous landmark changes in the internal thinking and workings of the IDNR and Illinois Government as it relates to natural areas and endangered species protection. Examples include the Natural Areas Preservation Plan, the Comprehensive Environmental Review Program (CERP, the Natural Areas Preservation Act, Build Illinois Program, Critical Trends Assessment, Resource Rich Areas, Eco Watch Program, Open Land Trust Program, Land and Water Conservation Fund, and Conservation 2000 Program.

County Forest Preserve Districts, County Conservation Districts, Conservation Land Trusts all use the INAI data to develop land protection plans. McHenry County Conservation District, Lake Country Forest Preserve and DuPage County Forest Preserved District are examples of agencies that have protected almost all the known INAI sites within their jurisdictions.

IDNR Comprehensive Environmental Review Program (CERP) Is a process that requires a review of existing information before state dollars can be spent on capital projects. It does not have the force of rule to mandate alternative actions that may impact INAI sites such a Bell Bowl Prairie.

Proposed action to support 30x30 goals.

Thanks to the Illinois Natural History Survey, Illinois has over 164-years of scientific information to make informed decisions about the conservation of our natural resources.

- ❖ INAI data needs to be shared among all IDNR conservation partners.

- ❖ The IDNR should consider partnering with the Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS) to update the Element of Occurrence (EOR) records.
- ❖ The CERP process needs to be amended to include a review of existing information before state dollars can be spent on capital projects that effect INAI sites and provide the rule of law to affect changes in design that would impair or minimize an INAI site.

6.0 II. Nature Preserves Commission (INPC) and the II. Endangered Species Board (IESB).

Illinois Nature Preserve Commission (INPC)

Created in 1963 by the Natural Areas Preservation Act, the mission of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC) is to assist private and public landowners in protecting natural areas and endangered species sites through voluntary agreements. INPC is made up of nine citizen commissioners appointed by the Governor to serve three-year terms. They serve without pay but are reimbursed for expenses.

There are currently 601 Dedicated Nature Preserves and Registered Land and Water Reserves in 96 of our 102 counties, totaling over 117,400 acres.

- Government agencies own most Nature Preserves but 83 are owned by private individuals and families. Several nature preserves are owned by corporations.
- Twenty-five percent of all of the occurrences of endangered and threatened species in Illinois are located in Nature Preserves or Land and Water Reserves. Nature preserves are also used extensively for scientific research.

Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board (ESPB)

In 1972, Illinois passed one of the first Endangered Species Acts in the country. This act also created the Endangered Species Protection Board. The mandated role of the ESPB is to list and delist species that are at risk of being extirpated from the state.

Proposed action to support 30x30 goals.

- ❖ The INPC is understaffed to manage the 117,000-acres of land enrolled in their protection programs. IDNR needs to hire additional INPC staff to fulfill the states' contractual obligation to protect and manage these sites.
- ❖ Support the Friends of the Illinois Nature Preserves System a 501(c)3 statewide group formed to assist the INPC to steward and protect Illinois Nature Preserves and Land and Water Reserves.
- ❖ With only one fulltime employee the ESPB is understaffed to fully execute its statutory obligations to examine species for listing and delisting species. An additional headcount is needed to hire a Listing Coordinator.

7.0 Wetland Protection

Isolated wetlands are no longer protected from draining and filling due to a 2001 Supreme Court decision, commonly referred to as the SWANCC decision. Months of comprehensive negotiations in Illinois among state agencies, local governments, business groups, and conservation organizations resulted in the drafting a bill which if adopted provided a good sense approach to wetland protection, taking into account the concerns of Illinois farmers, miners, utility companies, and other landowners while creating an effective statewide wetlands protection program

The benefits of all remaining wetlands are of importance to Illinois for the following reasons:

- Wetlands reduce flood damages by absorbing, storing and conveying peak flows from storm events and buffering aquatic ecosystems from drought.
- Wetlands improve water quality by serving as sedimentation, nutrient cycling and filtering basins and as natural biological treatment areas.
- Wetlands increase infiltration and replenish groundwater and aquifers.
- Wetlands provide breeding, nesting, forage and protective habitat for approximately 40 percent of the State's threatened and endangered plants and animals, in addition to other species of fish, wildlife, waterfowl, and shorebirds.
- Wetlands serve as recreational areas for hunting, fishing, boating, hiking, bird watching, photography and other uses.
- Wetlands reduce flooding, a problem that causes over \$300 million in damage to Illinois each year. Every 1 percent of a watershed in wetlands reduces peak flows after heavy rains by almost 4 percent statewide and almost 8 percent in northern Illinois.

Proposed action to support 30x30 goals.

- ❖ Pass state wetland protection legislation.

8.0 Great American Outdoors Act /Land and Water Conservation Fund

Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) authorizes permanent funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund at \$900 million annually to improve recreational opportunities on public lands, protect watersheds and wildlife, and preserve ecosystem benefits for local communities.

Currently only public agencies are eligible for a grant from this fund. Including Conservation Land Trusts in GAOA funding stream can protect more land than most agencies can do alone and with less push back. The AGOA is the cornerstone for the future protection of land and water resources conservation land trusts are the grass roots organizations to implement it a statewide and landscape scale.

To be able to fully utilize the federal funding IDNR will need more staff and a more streamlined process to execute land deals and grants in a timely fashion. It is very difficult to partner with IDNR now but if that changed, the conservation non-profits could help IDNR deploy the acquisition dollars even if the non-profits cannot directly use the LWCF dollars themselves.

An example: One local government partner lost an important site to another buyer because it took months and months for IDNR to approve the appraisal for an OSLAD grant.

Proposed action to support 30x30 goals.

- ❖ Work with the Illinois congressional delegation to amend federal legislation to make 501-(c) (3) not-for profit Conservation Land Trusts eligible for grants from the Land and Water Conservation Fund/ American Great Outdoors Act.
- ❖ Develop a system within IDNR to use conservation land trusts expertise to further 30x30 land protections and management goals.

9.0 30x30 Opportunities at Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and the Lost Mound National Wildlife Refuge.

In 1996, with the conversion of the closed 23,500-acre Joliet Arsenal to the 19,000-acre Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and the conversion of the closed 13,500-acre Savanna Army Depot, and the creation of the 9,000-acre Lost Mound unit of the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge under the Leadership of Governor Edgar, the taxpayers of Illinois were the beneficiaries of a windfall of \$19.45 billion dollars' worth of open space at no cost to Illinois taxpayers.

Joliet Army Training Area (JTA)—Will County

As part of the Defense Authorization Act that created Midewin, there was a provision that the 2,500-acre Joliet Army Training Area (JTA) should also be transferred to the U.S. Forest Service as part of Midewin when it was no longer need by the Military. The Army has since sold off land at the JTA, used parts of it for mitigation for a road project that was done by a private corporation suggesting that they no longer need it for military training purposes

Savanna Army Depot. —Jo Daviess and Carroll Counties

There are still hundreds of acres at the Savanna Army Depot that should be in conservation and outdoor recreational uses. Specifically, there is a block of over 300 acres of the high-quality sand prairie there that makes it the largest unprotected prairie left in left in the state of Illinois.

Proposed action to further 30x30 goals:

Joliet Army Training Area-

- ❖ Work with Senators Durbin and Duckworth to secure a Public Benefit Conveyance of the JTA to the state of Illinois or pass legislation via the Defense Authorization Bill to secure the JTA for public use, it would be worth over \$39-million dollars to Illinois.

Savanna Army Depot.

- ❖ Use funding from the newer federal funding Streams to purchase the G-Area grasslands.

Kerry Leigh, Natural Lands Institute

Governor Pritzker and Illinois 30 x 30 Conservation Task Force Members:

The undersigned would like to thank the Illinois 30 x 30 Conservation Task Force for their leadership in the effort to establish a bold goal to protect the natural lands and waters of Illinois by 2030. The stated mission of this effort notes that:

“Rapid land development in Illinois has led to the loss of vast amounts of natural lands and waters, impacting the quality of life of Illinois residents and potentially jeopardizing the future health of the state’s environment and economy.”⁵⁷

In fact, despite its nickname as the Prairie State, Illinois has lost more than 99 percent of its original open prairie and 95 percent of its original wetlands. Yet, there are important reasons to devote resources to our natural areas and to put Illinois on a path to wisely protect its natural heritage.

Investing in land conservation in Illinois is a sound economic choice.

Lands conserved in Illinois provide a host of benefits that have a measurable economic value to the state and its communities. They include natural goods and services such as water quality protection, wildlife habitat, air pollution removal, and carbon sequestration. Investments in land conservation and our state and local parks also support economic activity and job growth in a variety of other ways including recreational tourism, purchases of sporting goods, and boosts in nearby property values, to name a few. Land conservation in Illinois contributes to a thriving outdoor recreation economy generating \$25.8 billion each year and sustaining 200,000 jobs.

The protection and restoration of wildlife habitat is also strongly supported by the public.

Protecting and stewarding high quality habitat should be the first priority. The most recent Illinois Outdoor Recreation Survey found that 84.6% of respondents felt that a community’s outdoor recreation areas and facilities are important to quality of life and for the promotion of economic development and almost 80% wanted to see more wildlife habitats protected and restored.

A 2019 poll conducted by The Nature Conservancy showed that a majority of Illinois voters believe the state should be spending more on protecting land, water, and wildlife, with one-quarter (26%) saying “much more should be spent”. Voters’ top priorities for this funding included: protecting

⁵⁷ <https://www2.illinois.gov/dnr/programs/30by30/Pages/default.aspx>

wetlands, which help prevent flooding (73%), curbing air pollution (75%), providing opportunities for children to get outdoors and enjoy nature (71%), and protecting natural areas (62%).

Protecting and actively managing our remaining unprotected high quality INAI habitat should be a priority.

Completed in 1978, the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI) is an index of the state's most rare and unique natural sites. The INAI is often a helpful guide for state agencies, local forest preserves, park districts, land trusts, and private foundations interested in conservation. Illinois completed an update to the INAI in 2011, highlighting three key findings⁵⁸:

1. Natural area management is essential to the continued existence of these sites as natural areas that did not receive management have degraded or vanished; and
2. Small, fragmented natural communities and those subject to significant degradation from off-site factors are especially at risk of disappearing statewide; and
3. Prescribed fire as a management tool is critical.

To leverage existing investments in our Illinois natural areas, we respectfully request that the following recommendations be incorporated into the 30 x 30 Report to the Governor and the General Assembly:

Improve strategies to conserve and protect 30% of land and water by 2030 by:

Develop and adopt robust Administrative Rules for the current IDNR Endangered and Threatened Species Consultation Process.⁵⁹ Procedures for assessing impacts of agency actions on endangered and threatened species and natural areas are currently inadequate for 21st century threats.

Update the Ecological Compliance Assessment Tool⁶⁰ and Process Rules. This is the publicly accessible web-based tool that constitutes the first step for endangered and threatened species and other environmental review.

Integrate environmental considerations, land use planning, and other infrastructure projects into decision making. When proper consideration is given to the ecological impacts of new development, project feasibility and viability increases. Smart siting of new infrastructure projects can save taxpayer dollars and prevent delays in projects. This is especially pertinent as Illinois transitions to a clean energy economy. For example, the Central U.S. provides nearly 80 percent of the country's current and future onshore wind capacity. To ensure momentum continues in the clean energy sector especially, stakeholders must explore how to avoid negative effects on sensitive wildlife and habitats.

Provide tools and resources for landowners and private industry to manage resources responsibly and restore natural areas.

Provide meaningful incentives to private landowners who have INAI or other ecologically important conservation sites on their land that are unprotected. The Illinois Nature

⁵⁸ <https://www.ideals.illinois.edu/handle/2142/45937>

⁵⁹ [The Illinois Administrative Rule for Consultation](#)

⁶⁰ [EcoCAT](#)

Preserves Commission (INPC), a division of IDNR, regularly evaluates land under consideration for property tax incentive conservation programs. Nature preserves protect the highest quality natural lands in the state. Additionally, the Illinois Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is the largest and second oldest CREP in the nation and allows private landowners to protect environmentally sensitive land in the Illinois and Kaskaskia River watersheds through the voluntary easements. These lands ensure that the investments made in protecting water quality and improving wildlife habitat have a long-lasting impact. Further incentives for all private landowners with ecologically important conservation sites should be enhanced.

Improve ideas for private, public, and philanthropic funding for expanding protection and helping to manage protected lands.

Prioritize ramping up staffing capacity at the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The recent state budget is a positive step forward and will position the agency to get new hires. However, additional resourcing is needed to ensure the development of a talented and diverse staffing pipeline, the efficient administration of grants and other programs, and to take full advantage of recent federal investments in conservation. The conservation community stands ready to work with the IDNR in advocating for sufficient budgeting resources.

Create a substantial, long-term, dedicated source of state revenue. Altogether, there are approximately 360 park districts, 14 forest preserve districts, 5 conservation districts and over 40 private land trusts in the state. With a reliable source of funds, state governments and private nonprofit conservation organizations can establish meaningful conservation priorities that protect the most valuable resources, are equitably distributed and otherwise meet important statewide goals and values. Well-funded state governments are better positioned to secure and leverage funding from the federal government including providing match for federal grants as well as attracting local government or private philanthropic partners. The Recovering Americas Wildlife Act would bring \$26 million annually to Illinois. Increased and more available state funding would also promote equity in the allocation of resources. This could easily occur with an increase the existing real estate transfer tax supporting public land acquisition would be a significant improvement.

Enable non-profit conservation partners to access those funding streams. These additional resources will leverage this public investment and will bring additional capacity.

Include the true value of nature in our economic systems and project ROI's by utilizing the National System of Natural Capital Accounts to track and manage natural capital assets just like other economic assets⁶¹. These valuations and cost benefit analysis for a project should be incorporated as part of the alternatives analyses for a project and submitted and reviewed as part of the consultation process.

With partners, identify, promote and fund natural solutions practices through the carbon market like reforestation, forest management and cover crops to significantly increase

⁶¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/22/fact-sheet-president-biden-signs-executive-order-to-strengthen-americas-forests-boost-wildfire-resilience-and-combat-global-deforestation/>

carbon storage and reduce emissions through carbon markets. Limiting climate warming to under 2 degrees C requires increased mitigation efforts, including land stewardship⁶². This study quantifies the potential of natural climate solutions to increase carbon storage and avoid greenhouse gas emissions in the US. Twenty on conservation, restoration, and improved land management interventions on natural and agricultural lands increase carbon storage and avoid greenhouse gas emissions. Current carbon market prices (USD 10 per Mg CO₂).

Support the acquisition and restoration of floodplains, as this is more cost effective than paying for flood damages. Flooding is the costliest form of natural disasters, and impacts are expected to increase, in part, due to exposure of new development to flooding. However, these costs could be reduced through the acquisition and conservation of natural land in floodplains.⁶³ This reference quantifies the benefits and costs of reducing future flood damages in the United States by avoiding development in floodplains. By 2070, cumulative avoided future flood damages exceed the costs of land acquisition for more than one-third of the unprotected natural lands in the 100-year floodplain (areas with a 1% chance of flooding annually). Large areas have an even higher benefit–cost ratio: for 54,433 km² of floodplain, avoided damages exceed land acquisition costs by a factor of at least five to one. Strategic conservation of floodplains would avoid unnecessarily increasing the economic and human costs of flooding while simultaneously providing multiple ecosystem services.

Illinois increased investment in our state agencies and their NGO partners as well as our natural and agricultural areas will protect the remaining habitat for our native species, make natural areas available for all Illinois citizens to access and enjoy, mitigate climate change, enhance partnerships, and promote equity in the allocation of resources.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comment on this important initiative. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

The Natural Land Institute
www.naturalland.org

The Illinois Nature Conservancy
www.nature.org

Appendix VIII: Task Force Review Meeting Presentations

Introduction

- Chair Rogner gave a brief review of the duties of the task force.

⁶² Fargione et al. 2018. Natural Climate Solutions for the United States. Science Advances. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aat1869>

⁶³ Johnson et al. 2019. A benefit–cost analysis of floodplain land acquisition for US flood damage reduction. Nature Sustainability. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-019-0437-5>

- Among the findings of the General Assembly included in the original bill is that Illinois has lost large amounts of natural habitat across many areas, contributing to the overall loss of biodiversity.
- It also pointed out that what has happened in Illinois is just a microcosm of what has happened across the country and the globe.
- The legislation cited the recommendation of scientists that we need to conserve 30% of our land and water by 2030 to address the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change, and concluded by directing the task force to collect information in support of setting a bold goal for the amount of land to be conserved by that time.
- Chair Rogner discussed the listening sessions the task force held and how the task force can proceed from here.
 - All the written and verbal comments and presentations received have been collected and summarized in one document, shared with all.
 - Next the task force has eight weeks to prepare the actual report.

Presentation of the Vision

- Leon Hinz, Illinois State Wildlife Action Plan coordinator, presented a proposal for a 30 by 30 vision for the Illinois landscape.
 - We need a vision for three reasons:
 - To motivate us to action
 - To assess our progress
 - To celebrate our successes
 - To develop goals for conservation of land and water, we need to imagine different possible futures for the state.
 - A positive vision of the future aligns with our values.
 - A shared vision established with common values will enable us to develop collective goals and realistic recommendations.
 - There are many common values, discussed and presented during the listening sessions, that could inform this vision. Here are several examples:
 - All residents living and working in safe and healthy environments
 - Vibrant and sustainable economies existing throughout the state
 - All communities having equitable local access to open spaces
 - Land protection yields equitable distribution of benefits to all people
 - Ecologically important areas are effectively managed and protected
 - Key terrestrial and aquatic habitats are connected across the state
 - All types of land share in mitigating climate change
 - Robust populations of native species exist statewide
 - We have developed a three-part vision as a reflection of these values.
 - The Illinois landscape maintains native species, mitigates climate change, and provides equitable access to nature's benefits to all residents.
 - People in Illinois live and work in safe and healthy communities with vibrant economies, equitable local access to open spaces, and that support native species while contributing to a sustainable future.
 - Private landowners regularly adopt voluntary conservation measures that sustain Illinois' native plant and animal communities, mitigate climate change, and support recreational and economic activities throughout the state.

- John Rogner
 - Think the first statement gets at the twin crises at the core of 30 by 30, but it also goes beyond that to discuss access for all people, to their mental and physical health, in line with the national 30 by 30 movement.
 - I also like that it includes engaging private landowners, since any 30 by 30 strategy in Illinois is going to by necessity rely heavily on voluntary efforts on private land.

Presentation of Survey Comments

- Olivia Schickel presented key findings from the survey of students that was conducted by the student members of the task force.
 - We received more than 150 responses to the survey, covering a broad range of areas.
 - One comment was concerned about converting land from agriculture to urban areas, and supported encouraging native plants and animals.
 - Another comment cited agricultural runoff into waterways as a concern.
 - Others discussed the need to reduce the dependence on non-renewable energy.
 - Still others cited concerns about lack of forests, lack of access to forests.
 - These echo a lot of the themes that we have discussed – a focus on encouraging native biodiversity, promoting equitable access, for example.
 - A major theme across comments was concerns about land being taken out of agricultural production for conservation and solar energy production, how that affects farmers’ profitability, how that affects food availability.
 - Think this is an issue of education and marketing. Want to recommend that we understand these concerns and that we are looking for solutions that do not focus on taking land out of production, and that we want to improve profitability.

Task Force Discussion

Agricultural Areas

- Michael Lynch, IDNR staff, briefly summarized some of the programs discussed and comments received on the agricultural areas theme.
 - Comments varied, some expressing concern about urban development taking land out of agricultural production while others expressed concern about the impact of row-crop agriculture on natural habitats.
 - Across many comments, there was support for voluntary programs providing incentives to landowners and farmers for conservation practices.
 - Some of these programs pay farmers to take land out of production, while others focus on encouraging practices that provide broader ecosystem services.
 - IDNR Agricultural Lease Lands
 - FSA Conservation Reserve Program
 - IDNR Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program
 - NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program
 - IDoA Partners for Conservation
 - IDoA Fall Covers for Spring Savings
 - IDoA Stream Bank Stabilization Program
 - IEPA Section 319
- John Rogner

- Want to open it up for discussion on these themes and programs, how do we scale them up.
- Paul Ritter
 - Believe Olivia had some ideas on this.
- Olivia Schickel
 - With many of these programs we are not seeing the impact we would like.
 - A reason for that is people do not understand them or see them as being bad for their profitability; they would make more money just planting normally.
 - Think we should change direction to focus more on patches of pollinator habitat.
 - More agreeable to farmers, because does not necessitate taking land out of production
 - Easy for many people to get involved in at the community level since it is small scale
 - We would propose having agribusiness and seed producers help provide some of the initial funding for this and offering contracts to farmers to make more with this than regular planting in a tiered system.
- Brian Rennecker
 - A lot of federal conservation programs do not allow the stacking of private incentives on top of their programs, which may be a barrier to consider.
 - Like the idea, especially in the urban context with brownfields and vacant lots.
- Paul Ritter
 - Is that federal prohibition something we could talk to our legislators about?
- Brian Rennecker
 - Some of this is in the Farm Bill, which is currently in the process of being written for next year.
 - With cover crops, we worked directly with the USDA Risk Management Agency to get some leniency in what they would consider stacking.
- Bob Caveny
 - There is a part of CRP, called CP42, that is focused on pollinator habitat. It has been around maybe 10 years, and Illinois has around 200,000-300,000 acres enrolled in pollinator habitat through CRP currently.
- Jason Bleich
 - To add to that, all those acres are going to expire soon, so unless we can find a way to get them into a new program or revisit the CP42 guidelines, we are going to lose 200,000 of the best CRP acres in the state.
 - Also agree on the marketing. We often get so focused on the project that we forget to tell our story. As a field, we do not devote enough resources to that.
 - On another subject, other states have dedicated funding for their DNR. Missouri and Minnesota both dedicate a small portion of their sales tax to their state wildlife and conservation agency. That could be one of the biggest things we could do, if we could do that in Illinois.
- Todd Katz
 - Overall, what is the best way of conserving agricultural land? What is the goal if we want to get to 9 million acres?
- Bob Caveny

- Think that the main approach would be a focus on regenerative agriculture, changing how we farm to improve soil health.
- Right now, Illinois is mainly devoted to soybeans and corn, so empty seven months out of the year. Incorporating living plants, cover crops, in that time is important.
 - Soil health can improve agriculture in the long run and helps the biodiversity of underground ecosystems.
- Another change could be to cut down on insecticide use, which harms biodiversity.
- Lindsay Keeney
 - As we discuss new and expanded programs, want to make sure that the agencies implementing them have the capacity to do so.
 - Concurrent with creative thinking about programs, also need funding and staffing for these agencies, for the SWCDs
- John Rogner
 - Wholeheartedly agree, just to add that we are seeing some progress.
 - This upcoming budget is one of the best in a while, so an upward trend.
 - The Recovering America's Wildlife Act is expected to pass, providing \$25 million to IDNR every year for such programs.
- Todd Rettig
 - Back to agricultural practices, those are the same things we focus on when trying to reduce nutrient loading and runoff into waterways.
 - Important to build up these programs that have multiple overlapping benefits.
- Austin Omer
 - There are pretty good acreage estimates for conservation practices and nutrient loss reduction programs that you could borrow.
 - With President Biden's Earth Day address, they are planning to do a significant amount of conservation mapping through the Department of the Interior.
- John Rogner
 - Had seen about that mapping, do you know if states will have input in that mapping?
- Austin Omer
 - Currently do not know, sure you could reach out to them about that.
- Lindsay Keeney
 - They have had public comment on the Living Atlas project, but not sure they have gotten to the point of figuring out how to incorporate states into it.

Cities and Towns

- Michael Lynch, IDNR staff, briefly summarized some of the programs discussed and comments received on the cities and towns theme.
 - A major theme is the importance of accessibility to open space since these areas hold most of the population of the state.
 - We also heard about the possibility of seeing more conservation value from current open spaces, by converting turf in lawns or parks to pollinator habitat, for example.
 - We covered some programs that are intended to set aside land for conservation generally, but have a presence in urban areas, like state parks, as well as programs focused on urban areas, such those helping and encouraging homeowners to adopt conservation practices on their lawns.
 - Public Conservation Areas

- State
 - Local
 - Conservation Land Trust Areas
 - IDOT Right of Way Lands
 - Nature Preserves
 - IDNR OSLAD Grants
 - IDNR Coastal Grants
 - Urban Forestry
 - IEPA Green Infrastructure Grants
 - Private Habitat Registration (Conservation at Home)
- John Rogner
 - There may be a relatively larger role for public conservation areas in cities and towns, since there tends to be a demand for access to open spaces and the wealth to make that happen.
- Olivia Schickel
 - A common trend that we noticed in the comments was the existence of programs in these areas that are ready to go, but that require residents to reach out to them.
 - We need to connect these programs to community leaders, to make getting involved easy and accessible.
- Ellicia Sanchez
 - Agree that we want to make sure communities have the resources to access these programs, perhaps in terms of technical assistance.
 - Interested in the new Outdoor Recreation Partnership Service Program, offering grants to low-to-moderate income communities of 50,000 people or more to promote equitable access to green space.
 - Also wanted to call to attention the Vote Yes for Clean Air, Clean Water, and Wildlife Campaign, a ballot measure to increase to the Cook County Forest Preserves.
- John Rogner
 - Would like to add that our Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) grants typically require a 50/50 match, but we are allowed to provide a 90/10 match for underserved communities. Conducted more outreach recently and saw a response.
- Todd Katz
 - Wonder if there could be more of an effort to help private landowners reforest their lawns.
 - Know a big part is awareness, since there are organizations and governments that would like to provide trees. Could we partner with utility companies or another organization that communicates with everyone to spread awareness?
 - Or a holiday devoted to planting trees.
- John Rogner
 - IDNR with USFS has an Urban and Community Forestry Program to help cities and homeowners do exactly that. The questions are whether we can increase funding, measure success.
- Austin Omer

- Has IDNR looked at potentially using federal infrastructure funding for this program, or others? Could be something to report on to the General Assembly or the governor.
- John Rogner
 - Know the main infrastructure money for IDNR is for mine reclamation and oil and gas well plugging, but will check.
- Chris Young
 - We do have opportunities through the Infrastructure and Jobs Act to bolster forestry programs to a lesser extent.
- Todd Katz
 - Want to add an aspect of access is keeping people and dollars in the state since there are opportunities at home.

Natural Lands and Waters

- Michael Lynch, IDNR staff, briefly summarized some of the programs discussed and comments received on the natural lands and waters theme.
 - We have focused a lot on the importance of private landowners, but we also received comments emphasizing that public land and water should remain part of the conversation, especially to protect areas of high biodiversity.
 - Programs include both publicly owned areas, programs providing incentives for private landowner conservation, and areas where landowners voluntarily adopt practices improving the conservation value of their land.
 - Public Conservation Areas
 - Federal
 - State
 - Local
 - Conservation Land Trust Areas
 - IDOT Right of Way Lands
 - Nature Preserves
 - USFWS Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program
 - IDNR Forestry Programs
 - IDNR Conservation Stewardship Program
 - IDNR Illinois Recreational Access Program
 - NRCS Wetland Reserve Program
 - Solar Pollinator Scorecard Program
 - National Monarch Candidate Conservation Agreement
- John Rogner
 - At the state level, IDNR owns a significant amount of land, and although it is small compared to the state, it is already difficult to manage at current staffing levels.
 - For every acquisition, we need to think if we can manage it, and we are hitting our limit to a degree.
- Bob Caveny
 - On management, for the first time we are doing a full inventory of all the invasive species on our lands, including relative density and total acreage covered.
 - By May will have a good estimate on what it will take to deal with that.
- Ellicia Sanchez

- In thinking about prioritization, we should focus not just on total acreage but on the relative resiliency of the conserved land. Areas with more climate resiliency are of particular importance to protect.
 - Can provide public resources on this.

Next Steps

- Austin Omer
 - What are our next steps?
- John Rogner
 - Our plan would be to provide all of you an outline of the report based on this conversation and for you to respond with written comments.
 - Based on our feedback, we would put together the draft report and meet again to discuss that.
- Mike Vanderhoof
 - Think we have done some good scoping work, would like to see options presented, based on goal metrics, to help us decide where to focus our resources.
 - Would not mind more detail work, going through programs and seeing where there is low-hanging fruit, where there are legislative impediments, and so on.
- John Rogner
 - That is a good point. We can only do so much in this report, but I hope it is the start of a broader conversation.
- Austin Omer
 - Agree with that approach.
- Todd Katz
 - Could we work with citizen scientists to track biodiversity metrics, see how we are doing and where?
- John Rogner
 - Definitely.
- Matt Montgomery
 - Had connection issues earlier, but wanted to add to the agricultural discussion.
 - Like the idea of communicating the benefits of conservation practices, wonder if we can also tie them to efficiency in inputs.
 - Growers seeing nitrogen costs going up, production costs going up for inputs, so if we can explain that these practices and increase the efficiency of those inputs, that could be very powerful.
 - We tend to see those input prices not fall back once commodity prices go up.