

Illinois Nature Preserves Commission
Special Meeting Minutes
January 26, 2015

Illinois Department of Natural Resources
One Natural Resources Way
Springfield, IL

The Illinois Nature Preserves Commission and staff held a special meeting on Monday, January 26, 2015 at 1:00 p.m. at the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Lake Level B-C, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, Illinois.

The meeting was called to order at 1:05 p.m. by Chair Thomas.

Commissioners Present: George Covington, Donnie Dann, Pen Daubach, Abigail Derby-Lewis, William McClain, Jo-Elle Mogerman, David Thomas and Deborah Stone

Commissioners Absent: Charles Ruffner

Others present: Mary Kay Solecki, Kim Roman, John Nelson, Will Overbeck, Kerry Leigh, Joe Roth, Steve Byers, Valerie Njapa, Kelly Neal, Debbie Newman, Angella Moorehouse, Brooke Bryant, Samantha McCarrel, John Wilker, Bob Szafoni, Ann Holtrop, Tim Schweizer, Marni English, Tom Lerczak.

Director Heidorn explained that we will be working on strategic planning and developing goals and the strategies that will be used to reach those goals. We will work on developing SMART objectives: Specific, Measurable, Appropriate, Relevant, Time-limited. The process used to reach the goals began with a SWOT analysis (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) conducted with staff on January 21-23, 2015, will continue at this Special Meeting and the 219th meeting. He hoped to have a draft strategic plan sent out to Advisors, Consultants and Commissioners for review in March; preliminary approval at the INPC's May meeting; and final approval of the strategic plan document at the September meeting.

Director Heidorn gave a PowerPoint presentation detailing the SWOT analysis from the strategic planning done January 20-21, 2015. See Appendix I

Commissioner McClain asked that within each of these themes, are specific issues going to be identified. For example, under "protection", air quality from herbicide drift. Another recurring theme within all of these is the absence or lack of botanists. The colleges and universities made the decision nationwide to diminish traditional study programs in zoology and botany, in favor of pre-med, etc. In doing so, they have also diminished the number of qualified people. Somehow, some organization needs to get the message to them, that we need people throughout the country to fill jobs people are retiring from.

Director Heidorn explained that the Natural Areas Association is drafting an issue letter on for the journal Bioscience on the lack of botanists and field biologists which is being funded by the United States Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management.

Commissioner McClain also commented that adaptability has been a key in what the INPC and Natural Heritage have been able to do. He encouraged everyone to figure out ways that they can adapt, change and manage to accomplish some of these things.

Commissioner Dann asked how much all of this is affected by the attitude of the political leadership of the State.

Director Heidorn answered that the issues are not affected by the political leadership. Looking at the changes, many of the people here today were involved in the 2002 strategic planning discussion. Staffing, particularly administrative staffing, has begun to be the biggest concern since 2002. We have been in coasting mode since the loss of centralized administrative staff, having originally a single person each for stewardship, protection and defense. We have had major growth in the Nature Preserve System, but no growth in our ability to manage the system.

Commissioner Derby-Lewis asked if there has ever been discussion of doing co-hires: where staff already within IDNR or another partnership, have part of their time dedicated between stewardship and part of their time to other work. Is this possible or already been looked at?

Director Heidorn answered that INPC started with a partnership with the Natural Land Institute (NLI) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). Many of the early commission staff members were TNC or NLI employees. They served as INPC staff, but were paid by non-for-profits. We have moved away from that model.

Commissioner Thomas commented that we are past the doing more with less. The cutbacks in State government started more than seven years ago. The number of sites we have to manage has increased and the number of staff is far below where it was four to five years ago. The commission needs to reprioritize within our program. It is going to be essential that Commissioners get involved in this process and have serious discussions with staff. What looms over this process is we have a new administration and a huge deficit. There will be cuts. We do need to look at working closer with partners, potentially including sharing staff. However, we need to realize we can't do it all and need to prioritize.

Commissioner Daubach asked what would be the ideal staffing.

Director Heidorn answered he has always wanted to have additional staff to focus on stewardship. He would like to see some middle management. Currently he is not only working with administration and commissioners, but having to work directly with all staff at all levels. The commission needs managers who can focus on other techniques, like prescribed burns, stewardship, etc. There is no way to focus. Right now, he would be happy filling the three vacancies we currently have.

Tom Lerczak commented referring to the doing more with less, the question always comes to mind "why didn't you do more to begin with". If you can do more, why didn't you do more? In 2008, Randy wrote a memo doing less with less. This is the reality because as we get more sites and responsibilities, if the money is cut, staff is not filled, we are doing less with less.

Director Heidorn commented that one of his greatest frustrations is seeing that our budget has crept up, but we are not being allowed to hire. We are doing a lot more contractual work and getting more done but have reached the point where contracting is not working, because we do not have the capacity of people to put the contracts in place. We are not being allowed to hire people with the money we have. The dollars in NAAF have grown to the point where we are targets for sweeps.

Director Heidorn reviewed a proposed revised mission statement. He asked if this mission statement is good enough. Can the INPC live with this mission statement?

"The mission of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission is to assist private and public landowners

in protecting and stewarding high quality natural areas, habitats, endangered and threatened species, and other significant lands in perpetuity, in voluntary dedication or registration of such lands into the Nature Preserves System.”

Concern was expressed about length, content, priorities and use of the mission statement. After much discussion, it was decided staff would work on the mission statement, taking into consideration suggestions made by commissioners, staff and consultants.

Randy Heidorn reviewed the goals that were developed for 2002 plan which are provided in Appendix II.

He indicated that participants will self-divide into five breakout groups and write 1 to 3 goals. He suggested the groups be based on the SWOT themes.

Commissioner Derby-Lewis asked that Director Heidorn describe the progress on the 2002 plan goals, so that they could assess current status. She wanted metrics.

He indicated that he could provide a presentation he had given to staff prior to the SWOT analysis. Though the data is not complete, it might give a perspective on what has been accomplished.

Director Heidorn presented a series of slides on the status of items in the 2002 plan. Appendix III is notes for the presentation providing the status of the 2002 plan as of 2007.

After this presentation, Commissioner Covington asked if there were too many strategies in the original plan.

Director Heidorn indicated that with the three administrators in place at the time, the amount seemed reasonable. Unfortunately, changes in administration dropped support for the Commission and required stepping back from the plan. Director Heidorn used stewardship as an example. Prior to the changes he was working on management tracking, invasive species and fire. Management tracking was not done at all. Invasive species were moved to Heritage, that changed the emphasis to building relationships with the nursery industry away from direct invasive plant control. Fire was the only thing he was able to work on, since he was pulled off everything else to handle, the rest of the administrative load.

Commissioner Covington commented that he is often times concerned about the development of plans in these kinds of planning processes that are not prioritized and therefore are impossible to accomplish.

Director Heidorn indicated that the next important part of this planning process will be developing the strategies to accomplish the goals and then as a group prioritizing them. The plans will be even more prioritized when staff plans of work are developed.

After considerable discussion it was decided the group would breakup into groups for protection, defense, stewardship, identification, and outreach/partnership/operations.

It was also decided to review the 2002 goals in the groups to determine if they should be used in the new plan.

A break was taken from 3:30 p.m. to 3:40 p.m.

Commissioners, staff and consultants divided into breakout groups for approximately 35 minutes to discuss goals for stewardship, protection, defense, identification and outreach/partnerships. Recordings of those discussions were made and the results are herein presented with any discussion that followed.

List of goals developed in the break out session. Break out group that drafted the goals is listed in parenthesis.

- 1) Preserve and protect more of Illinois' high quality areas and other significant lands to protect Illinois' biodiversity. (Protection)
- 2) To better define lands that qualify for inclusion in the INPC system. (Protection)
- 3) To improve or maintain the condition of natural areas within the Nature Preserve System. (Stewardship)
- 4) To identify suitable area of significant natural resources to ensure comprehensive representation of Illinois' biodiversity. (Identification)
- 5) To proactively avert threats to lands or sites protected in the nature preserve system to prevent adverse effects. (Defense)
- 6) Increase efficiency and effectiveness in responding to incidence by enforcing the INAPA when violations occur in the nature preserve system. (Defense)
- 7) Enhance partnering opportunities using innovative approaches to be a model in preserving biodiversity in Illinois. (Outreach/Partnership)
- 8) Increase public awareness, support of and understand of INPC, its partners and their impact. (Outreach/Partnership)
- 9) Increase agency efficiency and effectiveness. (Outreach/Partnership)

Valerie Njapa reported the goals for the Defense working group (numbers refer to the above list):

- 5) To be proactive to avert threats before they adversely affect lands or sites protected in the nature preserve system to prevent adverse effects.
- 6) To increase efficiency and effectiveness in responding to incident by enforcing the INAPA when violations occur on lands protected in the nature preserve system.

Commissioner Covington reported goals for Protection:

- 1) Preserve and protect more of Illinois' high quality natural areas and other significant lands to protect Illinois' biodiversity.
- 2) To better define lands that qualify for inclusion in the INPC system.

Joe Roth asked how protection and being proactive tie into giving any guidance on how NAAF funding will be spent.

Commissioner Covington answered NAAF funding would be controlled through the IDNR, not the Commission.

Director Heidorn answered the Commission helps review what IDNR brings to the Commission for land acquisition with use of NAAF. The Commission can choose to endorse or not endorse the use of NAAF for those projects. We have a Memorandum of Understanding with IDNR that they will bring parcels to the Commission to get their approval for NAAF spending. If a site is on the INAI, your director can approve it, otherwise the only way to get it approved is through the Commission.

Angella Moorehouse pointed out that determining what works for a buffer or LWR is not a simple decision and varies with the context.

Kim Roman asked if we could add another goal under protection regarding improving preserve design.

Kelly Neal reported the goals for Stewardship:

- 3) To improve or maintain the condition of natural areas within the Nature Preserve System. This includes promotion adaptive management.

John Wilker asked is it your goal to improve or maintain or is it to work with the landowners to do this since the commission does not actually own the land.

Kelly Neal answered that the suggestion was made to incorporate facilitate into the wording of the goal.

Commissioner Mogerma commented that they changed the first word of their goal to encourage since it was hard to tell if this was a strategy or objective under some other goal, does it become something of itself or under stewardship, protection or defense. They did not have an answer.

Commissioner Mogerma reported the goals for Outreach/Partnerships:

- Revised goal four from 2002 planning to: 7) Enhance partnering opportunities using innovative approaches to be a model in preserving biodiversity in Illinois.
- Made a slight revision of goal six from 2002 planning to: 8) Increase public awareness, support of and understanding of INPC, its partners and its impact.
- Kept goal eight from 2002 planning: 9) Increase agency efficiency and effectiveness.

There was no breakout group for identification during this meeting. John Wilker chose to keep the goal from the 2002 planning which was: Identify suitable areas of significant natural resources to assure comprehensive representation of Illinois biodiversity.

Director Heidorn indicated nine goals have been outlined and asked if everyone was comfortable with those goals at this time.

Commissioner Stone suggested that Outreach/Partnerships' goal 7 be a strategy under Protection.

John Wilker stated that question was asked with goal 2 was a strategy for Stewardship but the Commission is defined within the Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act, as the ones capable of defining what a natural area is. That seems to be more the function of the Commission.

Commissioner Stone commented that not all functions are necessarily goals.

Commissioner Thomas commented that research is a strategy.

Commissioner Stone thought it might be a strategy under communications but it might also be here too. (from the old plan Appendix II)

Director Heidorn asked if goal three and goal five should be strategies elsewhere. (old plan Appendix II)

Commissioner Thomas commented at least goal five should be.

Director Heidorn commented that identification has never been a major issue for the commission staff.

Commissioner Covington stated that it is a means to protecting more of Illinois' biodiversity.

Director Heidorn commented that it is a necessary step in the process.

Commissioner Daubach suggested keeping goal three of maintaining the INAI.

It was agreed to keep goal three. (Listed now as Goal 4)

Director Heidorn asked about moving goal three under one.

Commissioner Daubach suggested that it be kept as a separate goal. As we evaluate and reevaluate the INAI, we will know how well we are doing and that it is a very vital piece of what INPC does.

Commissioner McClain agreed it was vital.

Debbie Newman commented that if the INAI was updated to define what a nature preserve is according to the INAPA, it guides what the commission does.

Commissioner Mogergerman stated that if it stays separate, it needs to be rewritten since it did not go with what Debbie Newman stated.

Commissioner Thomas commented that we have two different concepts which are monitoring existing INAI sites and looking at additional sites. The evaluation of existing sites could go under preserve and protect high quality natural areas. That would be a strategy to do that or it could be deemed important enough to be separate.

John Wilker commented that if we remove it as a goal, you are going to have strategies under stewardship, protection, defense and outreach that will be related.

It was agreed to keep goal three (new goal 4) and wordsmith it.

Director Heidorn asked if everybody was comfortable with our draft goals reminding everybody that they might be reworked later in the process.

Commissioner Thomas asked where administrative issues get picked up.

Director Heidorn answered there is an efficiency goal under number eight.

Commissioner Thomas asked if it was a separate goal

Director Heidorn answered yes. He asked the spokesperson from each group to write their goal on the large sheets and this will be our starting point for the second phase of the process which resumed in the afternoon of January 27th.

Commissioner Covington moved to adjourn the Special Meeting and it was seconded by Commissioner Daubach.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:50 p.m.