

Special Joint Meeting Minutes
Illinois Nature Preserves Commission
Endangered Species Protection Board
January 21, 2020

Illinois Department of Natural Resources
One Natural Resources Way
Springfield, IL 62712

The Illinois Nature Preserves Commission and the Endangered Species Protection Board held a special joint meeting on Tuesday, January 21, 2020 at the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Lake Level Rooms A, B and C, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, Illinois.

The meeting was called to order at 2:05 p.m. by the Endangered Species Protection Board Chair Joyce Hofmann and the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Chair George Covington.

Endangered Species Protection Board Members Present: Joyce Hofmann, Tracy Evans, Bruce Ross-Shannon, Philip Willink, Angelo Capparella and Randy Schietzelt.

Commissioners Present: George Covington, Pen DauBach, William McClain, Deborah Stone, David Thomas, Jo-Elle Mogerman and Charles Ruffner.

Commissioners via Phone: Donnie Dann

Commissioners Absent: Abigail Derby Lewis

Others present: Chris Young, Office of Resource Conservation (ORC); Valerie Njapa, Kelly Neal, Stacy Burkett, Byron Paulsen, Kim Roman, John Nelson, Steve Byers, Debbie Newman, Angella Moorehouse, John Griesbaum, Sami Childerson, Kevin Sierzega, Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC) Staff; Ann Holtrop, Todd Strole, Jenny Skufca, John Wilker, Stephen Tillman, Brian Metzke, Bridget Henning, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), Division of Natural Heritage (DNH) and Justin Dillard, Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) with Impact Assessment Section; Jeannie Barnes, Emily Feng, Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS); Austin Owen, Illinois Farm Board (IFB); Ben Snyder, IDNR, Division of Forestry; Mike Baltz, Let the Sun Shine In (LSSI); Nancy Williamson, Natural Lands Institute (NLI).

Welcome, Introduction and Meeting Purpose

Chris Young, Director, Office of Resource Conservation (ORC) welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked attendees to introduce themselves. After introductions, Chris explained the vision and idea behind the meeting, stating that the ORC and Department of Natural Resources are currently working through the beginning stages of a strategic planning process. A facilitator from Prairie Research Institute has been brought in to assist with this process. The Governor's office has asked that ORC track its progress by developing goals and metrics which will be reported monthly. Chris explained it is very important that effort is made to ensure all the things ORC does is dependable and

understandable. As a Department, this exercise has been very good in allowing ORC to communicate clearly through the process. The hope for today is that we spur some discussion and conversations about how we all can continue to collaborate and grow those collaborations into relationships. Chris thanked the members of the Endangered Species Protection Board for being here today, as there are some overlapping missions that will be beneficial to all involved.

Item #1: Overview of Mandates, Processes and Progress

Todd Strole, Program Section Manager, Division of Natural Heritage (DNH), addressed the group and regarding mandates, status update, challenges, meeting these challenges, integrating needs and looking forward. A lot of the information shared serves to guide what we do and how we do it. The missions of the Board, Commission and Department are so intertwined, that we can't separate them. Therefore, we feel this is a good analysis that shows how this collective work is all integrated and how we intend to go further with it in a more strategic way. Todd summarized by saying a lot of the information shared serves to guide what we do and where we should be focusing our time and attention. The analysis shows how this collective work is integrated and how we intend to move forward in a more strategic way.

Item #2: Challenges to Mandates

Ann Holtrop, Chief, Division of Natural Heritage (DNH), began by stating that the Administration is pushing heavily for performance metrics. The Department is undergoing a strategic planning process to focus internally on getting things in order, fixing processes and figuring out new ways of doing business so we can better work under the conditions of 2020. All these ways are focused on justifying the work we do, thinking about different ways of doing our work and being transparent with our analysis and sharing the information that we use in processes so that others can understand our decision making and work along side of us.

All of this brings us to this point in time. How do we identify and target specific needs for protection? We need to be increasingly strategic in our approach. Not that we were not strategic in the past, but new demands, new information, new analytics, new positions, and limited staff and resources call for new levels of sophistication. The Department is addressing this in several ways: A Department Strategic Plan, State Wildlife Action Plan projects, establishment of positions that are focused specifically on stewardship actions and recovery, and new tools and processes that assist in prioritization and decisions at all levels, from land acquisition to management.

There are many challenges to a truly strategic approach. Decisions may be subjective or opportunistic due to:

- Imperfect information
- Limited staff/resources
- Low hanging fruit
- Political interests
- Partner interests
- Expert opinion and human biases

Conservation has long been treated as a race against the clock. We do as much as we can as fast as we can within our constraints. However, decisions suffer from data needs, outside influence and human bias. Improved information and standardized tools and platforms lead to:

- Justified decisions
- Defense of staffing levels and funding
- Partner collaboration.

Item #3: Meeting these Challenges

Dr. Bridget Henning, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, stated that one way to increase the accuracy and objectivity of our work is with continued and increased collection of information through surveys and monitoring efforts. There are too many to name, but some of the major items include:

- Numerous State Wildlife Grant (SWG) projects on species or groups
- Of relevance is the study on the Effectiveness of Illinois' Protected Lands Network at Supporting Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) and Their Habitats (Grant Project T-115-R1)
- Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI) update and recheck
- Training and evaluation tool for INAI assessments
- sRanks and rarity ranking for natural communities
- Improving and increasing standardization of information to inform listing decisions.
- sRanks and rarity rankings for species
- Using this in an integrated fashion to guide land acquisition
- Using this to guide protection and recovery strategies in a Geographic Information System (GIS) platform
- Using rarity ranking, monitoring and surveillance to prioritize stewardship needs and actions

Emily Feng, Illinois Natural History Survey, stated that we are all faced with decisions in our work. Decisions about which sites to do stewardship work at, which species to do recovery work on, which pieces of land to purchase or dedicate. It's a complicated decision with lots of aspects, but some of these aspects can be quantified to assist in making these decisions. T-115 is designed to produce tools to help you handle some of these aspects and make informed decisions. T-115 also quantifies and standardizes key areas of biodiversity and gaps in protection on the statewide level. The results can be used to inform these priorities. Emily presented examples via PowerPoint to the group.

ATTACHMENT 1 – Used for Items 1, 2 and 3

Commissioner McClain asked where community reconstruction fits into all of this.

Todd Strole answered and stated INAI has a special category for high quality reconstruction.

Commissioner McClain stated for many of these communities, reconstruction is difficult. Where does management enter the picture?

Ann Holtrop answered that management is very important. Of all the different places we work, it is very difficult to determine where to use stewardship dollars. How do we assess the effectiveness of those actions? A project is being launched to determine the effectiveness of management so we can quantify that response better.

Item #4: Integrating Needs: Let the Sun Shine In

Ben Snyder, District Forester, Illinois Department of Natural Resources shared a PowerPoint presentation and background information on the Trail of Tears State Forest Demonstration Area and provided management techniques that have been implemented to help restore the oak ecosystem. Ben also provided some of the details of why forests need management and some of the steps that other areas may be able to implement to restore oak ecosystems.

Mike Baltz, Coordinator for the Let the Sun Shine In Program, presented a PowerPoint presentation entitled “An Innovative Conservation Partnership” that explained in detail the Why and How of a Partnership; innovations of LSSI such as the Landscape Stewardship Approach, Effective Messaging, Forest Stewardship Clusters and Private Lands (Shared) Database. Mike also explained how LSSI works, explaining the Constellation Collaboration which is a model for multi-organizational partnerships and accomplishments of the program. The final topic of discussion highlighted how LSSI can be a model for similar partnerships.

ATTACHMENT 2

Commissioner McClain made a point that many plant species are dependent upon some sort of disturbance; it may or may not be fire and it often is not. We need to look into the life history of some of these species and dig more into what Let the Sun Shine In is doing. These changes, which have been going on for 200 years or so are like a runaway train track and once they get going it is very difficult to stop and reverse. Commissioner McClain also complimented Let the Sun Shine In on what great work they are doing.

Mike Baltz stated that we will never get back to what the surveyors saw in the 1800’s but we must do the best we can with what we have left.

Steve Byers asked what is next as far as the program goes and as these two groups come together. He asked where we are headed.

Mike Baltz stated that he and Ben Snyder talked about the goal of this talk and ultimately determined that getting people excited about the program, getting people working together and about the partnership are most important.

Ben Snyder stated that the key message is Let the Sun Shine In. You can take a lot of different paths to come to that end but if we all agree that that is where we want to go, we want to improve habitat, improve this ecosystem and work towards restoration, how you get there can be accomplished in different ways. Forming a collaborative partnership is most important.

Chris Young closed the meeting by thanking everyone for their time. He then opened the floor for questions.

Commissioner DauBach directed a question to Chris Young regarding the overall meeting. Pen stated Chris started the meeting by asking George Covington, INPC and Joyce Hofmann, ESPB to call the meeting to order. She also stated that it was a wonderful presentation on collaboration and believe most people recognize and are in favor of this. Pen then asked Chris what input he asked for from ESPB or INPC prior to today’s meeting?

Chris Young stated he asked if everyone wanted to get together regarding collaborative possibilities to start to develop relationships with the Boards. It was a chance to get together to hear what the Departments are doing and what the partners are doing to talk about some of the possibilities.

Commissioner DauBach responded by saying Chris called a meeting of ESPB and INPC but wanted to know what collaboration from them was requested regarding the design and input of the meeting.

Chris Young stated he didn't know if he asked for anything specific. He said he did ask if anyone was interested in having a collaborative meeting the day before the regular meeting. He asked if Pen had suggestions from here going forward.

Commissioner DauBach said she is a major believer in partnership and was quite furious when the agenda came out and we had heard nothing about it.

Chris Young apologized if Pen had not heard anything about this meeting. Chris then asked Pen if she was referring to this meeting.

Commissioner DauBach stated she had only heard that there was going to be a joint meeting, not what was going to be addressed.

Chris Young stated that he thought some of that groundwork had been done prior to the meeting, but if not, that was on him.

Commissioner DauBach asked if Joyce Hofmann had heard anything.

Joyce Hofmann stated no, she knew we were having a meeting, but she did not know specifically what was going to be covered.

Chris Young stated he did not ask for approval of an agenda and that is on him.

Commissioner Covington thanked Chris and all presenters for a very informative meeting. He also asked if it would be possible for the PowerPoints to be sent out electronically for review.

Chris Young answered yes, that the PowerPoints can be shared electronically. He then explained that when he saw the Let the Sun Shine In program at a Forestry Division meeting last spring, he thought it was fantastic and a very interesting model and wanted everyone to see it. Chris also shared this is the first go at a joint meeting to get people together and start thinking and talking and working together just a little bit more.

The meeting was adjourned by Joyce Hofmann and George Covington at approximately 4:22 p.m.