

**ILLINOIS NATURE PRESERVES COMMISSION  
TWO HUNDRED FIFTY-FIRST MEETING MINUTES**

Byron Forest Preserve  
Jarrett Prairie Center  
7993 North River Road  
Byron, IL 61010

September 9, 2025, 10:00 a.m.  
In-person meeting with WebEx option

Andrew Hawkins, Executive Director of the Byron Forest Preserve District, welcomed the Commission and encouraged the audience to take a moment to look around and explore the grounds as time allowed. He expressed gratitude for being able to host this meeting.

**(251-1): Call to Order, Roll Call, and Introduction of Attendees**

Commission Chair Parker called the meeting to order at 10:01 am and read the roll call.

Commissioners Present: Michelle Parker, Radhika Miraglia, Toni Oplt, Tom Clay, Adam Kessel, Chris Evans, Marcella DeMauro-Roth, John Rogner and Connie Carroll-Cunningham

Advisors Present: Joyce Hoffman

Consultants Present: Amy Doll, Kim Erndt-Pitcher, Jordan Gurneau, Joe Roth, Izabella Redlinski, Daniel Suarez, Jo Fessett, Alan Branhagen, Cynthia Kanner, Deb Stone, Randy Heidorn

Others Present: Todd Strole, Assistant Director of the IDNR; Kaleb Baker, John Nelson, Kim Roman, Angella Moorehouse, Byron Paulsen, John Griesbaum, Debbie Newman, Sami Childerson, Kevin Sierzega, Lorraine Foelske, Kelly Neal, Valerie Njapa, Brook Thureau, Nick Foster, and Emily Taylor from INPC; Ann Holtrop, Dawn Cobb, Brooke Morgan, Natalia Maass, Alysha Davis, Jeff Horn, Mark Alessi, Charles O’Leary, Michelle Simone, and Eric Smith from IDNR; Randy Locke from the Illinois State Geological Survey; Jeffrey Craver from the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District; Jamie Arntzen from the Illinois Audubon Society; Russel Brunner and Andrew Hawkins from the Byron Forest Preserve District; Jason Mol and Kristi Shoemaker from the Peoria Park District; Jill Kennay from the Natural Land Institute; Mike Miller from the Peoria Audubon

Society; Gary Coon, a landowner; Rob Foelske and Dawn Fronk, members of the public.

**(251-2): Adoption of Agenda**

Commissioner Rogner made the motion to adopt the Agenda, seconded by Commissioner Clay, and carried that the Agenda for the 251st Meeting be approved.

**(251-3): Approval of Minutes for the 250<sup>th</sup> Meeting, held on May 13, 2025**

Commissioner Miraglia requested an amendment to the 250th minutes. It listed her in attendance in error, and she asked the record to reflect that she did not attend the 250th meeting.

It was moved by Commissioner Evans, seconded by Commissioner DeMauro-Roth, and carried that the minutes of the 250th Meeting be approved.

Commission Chair Parker then read the Accomplishments Summary for the 250th Meeting:

*At the 250th Meeting of the INPC, held on May 13, 2025, at the Vermilion County Conservation District in Westville, Illinois, legal protection was completed by the Commission for seven tracts of land totaling 1,207 acres. One of these tracts is privately owned, two are publicly owned, and four are owned by not-for-profit organizations. The owners of the private site donated the value of the protection agreement to the public. Two sites with three tracts were protected as land and water reserves: one tract registered as Addition to Warbler Bottoms North and two tracts as Okàn Savanna. Four sites were dedicated as nature preserves: Addition and Buffer Addition to Busse Forest, Chautauqua Prairie, Addition and Buffer Addition to North Dunes, and Addition and Buffer Addition to Spivey's Valley Glade.*

*There are now 423 dedicated nature preserves with 65,243 acres and 216 registered land and water reserves with 60,041 acres. Altogether, there are 639 sites totaling 125,284 acres protected in the Illinois Nature Preserves System.*

A Resolution for former Commissioner Abigail Derby Lewis (Resolution 2686) was read. See Attachment 1 for full resolution.

**(251-4): Next Meeting Dates and Locations**

|     |                  |                                                                                              |
|-----|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 252 | February 3, 2026 | Illinois Department of Natural Resources<br>Joel Brunsvold Building<br>Springfield, Illinois |
| 253 | May 19, 2026     | Peoria Park District<br>Peoria, Illinois                                                     |

|     |                    |                                                     |
|-----|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| 254 | September 15, 2026 | Lake Sara Community Building<br>Effingham, Illinois |
|-----|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|

**(251-5): INPC Staff Report**

Todd Strole, Assistant Director  
Illinois Department of Natural Resources

The full INPC Report is attached as Appendix I. Todd Strole's oral remarks are provided in Attachment 2.

Kaleb Baker provided a report on the reinterment guidance document for Native American remains, based on a Resolution 2668 from the 249th meeting. He reported that staff have been working closely with the Illinois State Museum; Logan Pappenfort, Illinois Tribal Relations Director; Dawn Cobb, IDNR Archaeologists; and many others to draft guidelines for reinterments. Guidelines will follow the Casper Bluff model, where INPC staff will work with the landowner to identify an area where the reinterments can occur, and then tribes will be able to choose where to reinter remains within that area. The guidelines will specify that the reinterment area will not include Grade A or B natural areas, disturb cultural resources already present, or impact threatened and endangered species.

Baker continued. The guidelines will include a policy for data protection to keep the location of reinterments private. He has requested feedback from Commissioner Kessel, Consultant Jordan Gurneau, and several Tribes, but more feedback is needed before the guidelines are ready to be presented.

Commission Chair Parker inquired about the information to be included in management plans. Is this for specific sites that have opted in or all sites moving forward? Will staff be approaching landowners about reinterment? She asked what the entry point for this discussion would be.

Baker responded that the entry point will be working with individual landowners. He has already begun these discussions.

Commission Chair Parker clarified that the expectation is that staff will be proactive.

Baker replied yes, that is the intention. It may work the other way around as well, where Tribes may want to do a reinterment at a specific site and begin the coordination with the Illinois State Museum.

Commissioner Rogner asked Todd Strole about herbicide drift provisions and if the volatility of herbicide formulas has been addressed.

Strole replied that he cannot speak for the companies that produce the herbicide, but he does know they are designed to work with a volatility-reducing agent. This agent

is prescribed based on the temperature to reduce volatility, but Strole was not sure if the original formula was any different.

Consultant Kim Erndt-Pitcher commented that the ratios in which the agent is administered are not without ecological concerns. Research on the volatility has been done on a smaller scale, not the 1000 acres on which it is typically applied.

Commissioner Miraglia asked about the reinterment guidelines and asked for clarification on the potential threats and the need to designate a specific section of a site for reinterment.

Strole replied that there are two reasons. First is ecological, such as avoiding habitat for threatened and endangered species. Second is archaeological, such as avoiding digging up cultural sites that already exist.

Commissioner Miraglia asked if there are long-term considerations in conjunction with digging and ecological concerns.

Baker responded that there are long-term management impacts where a buffer area around the reinterment would prevent soil disturbance and restrict what management activities can occur.

**(251-6): IDNR Staff Report**

Ann Marie Holtrop, Chief  
Division of Natural Heritage

The full IDNR Report is attached as Appendix II.

Holtrop highlighted the proactive success at Mermet Lake Flatwoods Archery Tournament, and the shared ownership across the Department in finding a resolution. She also commented on the success of the Illinois State Fair, which also marked IDNR's 100th anniversary. In addition, she mentioned legislative updates for the Endangered Species Protection Board and commented on the impending release of the Illinois State Budget.

**(251-7): Endangered Species Protection Board Report**

Dr. Joyce Hofmann  
Endangered Species Protection Board

The full ESPB Report is attached as Appendix III.

Dr. Joyce Hofmann delivered her last report as Chair of the Endangered Species Protection Board. She commented on how she has enjoyed attending the Commission meetings and observing everyone at work. Over the ten years she served as the Chair of ESPB, she has seen many dedicated people serve on the Commission. She noted she has been impressed by how much is accomplished by such a small group of

people. She thanked Commissioners and staff and commended their dedication and expertise.

**(251-8): Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves Report**

Amy Doll, Director  
Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves

The full report is attached as Appendix IV.

Amy Doll highlighted the accomplishments and dedication of volunteers across the state. She commented on the decision made by U.S. Fish and Wildlife to cease supporting monitoring of the Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid; in response, volunteers stepped up to continue their work with the support of Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves.

Doll expressed concern that we are not spending enough time at Commission meetings addressing challenges and threats to the Illinois Nature Preserves System. She noted the need to collaborate with the people in the room and the wider conservation community to work toward addressing the threats. She described stories of threats at sites across the state, particularly in Will County, where invasives were prevalent at Grant Creek Prairie Nature Preserve. She commented on how many sites are at risk of losing the very features they were dedicated for.

Doll offered perspective through numbers. From 1991 to 2020, the Nature Preserves System grew from 200 sites to 599, or 28,000 acres to 114,000. She stated that during that time, staff and funding diminished significantly. Some might say it was economical that we protected more land with fewer staff. But many know that was not the case. Land was protected from development, but not ecological degradation.

Doll continued. She stated that we are losing sites and not talking about the threats to them enough. Each meeting, we come together and celebrate, but we are losing the biodiversity in this state. More conversations are needed.

Doll expressed that she was initially encouraged by the reports on herbicide drift at each meeting, but it has been over a year since the Natural History Survey Report. Doll stated that at that time, we said we had enough information to act, but we have not yet acted.

Doll noted that when the alarm was sounded on Grant Creek Prairie Nature Preserve, people echoed the call by writing blog posts, putting out postcards, and calling friends and neighbors, and people showed up to help. She reminded us that more staff and more contractors are not the only answer and emphasized the need to have more people who care. We need a culture that values nature, and we need advocates, educators, community members, and volunteers on the ground to build that culture. She told a story about empowering volunteers through prescribed burns and the way in which they built community around a particular site.

Doll noted the deadline for presentation proposals for the upcoming Wild Things Conference in southern Illinois on January 31, 2026.

Commissioner Rogner thanked Doll for being so blunt in her statements. He expressed on behalf of the Commission that they can handle the truth. He noted how timely the comments were in conjunction with his own conversation with fellow Commissioner DeMauro-Roth on what a wonderful job the Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves has done in organizing volunteers across the state. He looks forward to reading the Friends report at each meeting.

Commissioner Rogner noted we don't really know the extent of the problem. He proposed the need for an updated assessment to understand the scope and magnitude of the problems facing the Nature Preserves System. He suggested a focused conversation at a future meeting to tackle the issue. Without understanding the scope, we will not be able to assess the remedy. He thanked Doll for bringing this issue up and starting the conversation towards a solution.

Doll agreed and noted that right now, we only have a feeling about the issue, which can be very overwhelming.

Commissioner Evans commented on the invasive populations of stilt grass developing in Wisconsin. He noted this is alarming and a problem that those in southern Illinois are already familiar with. He offered a public service announcement for northern Illinois to be on alert for this species and its impact on forested areas.

Commission Chair Parker thanked Commissioner Rogner for his comment. She stated it would be helpful for her to understand what the available solutions are in terms of resources and how they would be addressed. She expressed that she would like to see the Commission meetings productively working toward a solution, and understanding the problem is part of that.

**(251-9): Committee of the Whole Meeting to Propose Nominations for Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Advisors, Consultants and Officers**

**Committee Chair:** Commissioner Clay

Each September meeting, the Commission nominates and approves the list of Officers, Advisors, and Consultants. Committee Chair Clay presented the nominations for Officers, Advisors, and Consultants.

Commissioner Clay made the motion to accept the nomination of Advisors, with the replacement of Dr. Richard C. Berg by Steve Brown for the Illinois State Geological Survey, seconded by Commissioner DeMauro-Roth, and carried that the slate of nominated Advisors be accepted for consideration.

Commissioner Clay made the motion to accept the nominations of Consultants, with the addition of Abigail Derby Lewis and Daniel Suarez, seconded by Commissioner

Rogner, and carried that the slate of nominated Consultants be accepted for consideration.

Commissioner DeMauro-Roth recused herself from the Consultant vote due to being related to a candidate.

Commissioner Clay made the motion to accept the nominations of Officers, seconded by Commissioner Evans, and carried that the slate of nominated Officers be approved.

#### A. Nomination of Advisors

##### Current Advisors:

|                                                                        |                                                                         |                                                                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Natalie Finnie<br>IL Dept. of Natural Resources<br>(Statutory Advisor) | Dr. Michael Dreslik<br>IL Natural History Survey<br>(Statutory Advisor) | Dr. Jennifer Edginton<br>IL State Museum<br>(Statutory Advisor)                    |
| Dr. Joyce Hofmann<br>IL Endangered Species<br>Protection Board         | Steve Brown<br>IL State Geological Survey                               | Jeffery Nevins<br>IL Dept. of Natural Resources<br>Office of Historic Preservation |
| Alleen Betzenhauser<br>IL State Archaeological Survey                  | Dr. Kevin O'Brien<br>IL Sustainable Technology Center                   | Dr. Praveen Kumar<br>Prairie Research Institute                                    |

#### B. Nomination of Consultants with the addition of Abigail Derby Lewis and Daniel Suarez to the Current Consultants list.

##### Current Consultants:

|                   |                    |                 |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| Gerald Adelman    | Jill Allread       | Alan Branhagen  |
| George Covington  | Amy Doll           | Harry Drucker   |
| Kim Erndt-Pitcher | Jo Fessett         | Jordan Gurneau  |
| Fran Harty        | Randy Heidorn      | Dr. Jim Herkert |
| Cynthia Kanner    | Kerry Leigh        | Bill McClain    |
| Gloria Orozco     | Izabella Redlinski | Jill Riddell    |
| Lauren Rosenthal  | Bruce Ross-Shannon | Joseph Roth     |
| John Schwegman    | Deborah Stone      | David Thomas    |
| Michelle Uting    | Jeff Walk          | John White      |

#### C. Nomination of Officers

##### Current Officers:

Chair: Michelle Parker  
Vice Chair: Radhika Miraglia  
Secretary: Adam Kessel

#### (251-10): Marshall County – Buffer Addition to Oak Bluff Savanna Nature Preserve, Preliminary Dedication

This item was presented by Lorraine Foelske.

The Peoria Audubon Society requested preliminary approval for the dedication of 14.5 acres as a buffer addition to the existing Oak Bluff Savanna Nature Preserve (NP). The original 5-acre nature preserve was dedicated in 2002. This site is in Marshall County in a transition zone between the bluffs of the Illinois River and the state's expansive Grand Prairie, containing forest, savanna, and prairie habitats. Oak Bluff Savanna is currently owned by Peoria Audubon Society. The area is part of the Grand Prairie Section of the Grand Prairie Natural Division of Illinois. In 1999, Oak Bluff Savanna was recognized on the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI #1559) for 0.61 acres of Grade B dry-mesic savanna. Although the site has since been removed from the INAI as Category I due to acreage minimums, Oak Bluff Savanna is an important natural area containing many conservative plant species, including Hill's thistle (*Cirsium hillii*), Seneca snakeroot (*Polygala senega*), and rough false foxglove (*Agalinis aspera*). The existing NP site remains on the INAI list as Category III. Oak Bluff Savanna also provides critical bird habitat, especially for vulnerable species observed at the site, including the state-threatened (ST) black-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*) and two state-endangered (SE) birds – the northern harrier (*Circus hudsonius*) and the American bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*). The site contains a mowed trail and is accessible to the public. This proposed 14.5-acre buffer area is primarily forested with several prairie openings, a 0.5-acre human-made pond, and a three-acre restored prairie. With the proposed addition, the site will total 19.5 acres.

Within the proposed buffer to Oak Bluff Savanna Nature Preserve, Peoria Audubon Society requested to reserve the following rights:

1. Maintain pond, pond berm, and drainage infrastructure; and
2. Maintain existing trails and signage.

Staff of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission recommended preliminary dedication of 14.5 acres as a nature preserve buffer addition to Oak Bluff Savanna Nature Preserve.

It was moved by Commissioner Clay, seconded by Commissioner DeMauro-Roth, and carried that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants preliminary approval for the dedication of Buffer Addition to Oak Bluff Savanna Nature Preserve, owned by the Peoria Audubon Society, as described in the proposal presented under Item 10 of the agenda for the 251st Meeting.

(Resolution 2687)

**(251-11): Pope County – Spivey's Valley Glade East Buffer Addition to Spivey's Valley Glade Nature Preserve, Preliminary Dedication**

This item was presented by Kevin Sierzega.

The Spivey family requested preliminary dedication of 2.9 acres of nature preserve buffer as the Spivey's Valley Glade East Buffer Addition to the Spivey's Valley Glade NP in northeastern Pope County, Illinois. Spivey's Valley Glade NP (#274) first received final approval for dedication as an Illinois nature preserve at the 157th Illinois Nature Preserves Commission meeting in 1998; a later addition received final approval at the 250th INPC meeting in May 2025. The NP is in the Lesser Shawnee Hills Section of the

Shawnee Hills Natural Division of Illinois. It protects 103.6 acres of habitat; 31.2 acres as NP and 72.4 acres as NP buffer.

Spivey's Valley Glade INAI site (#1526) is recognized for Category I, II, and III features and totals 516.13 acres. All of the Category I high-quality natural community, comprised of 31.6 acres, is protected in the Nature Preserves System and includes Grade A limestone glade, Grades A and B dry-mesic woodland, and Grade B dry-woodland natural communities. The preserve resides within the East Shawnee Conservation Opportunity Area (COA). The 2.9-acre east buffer addition is contiguous with the existing east boundary of NP buffer. Natural communities in the addition are a combination of old field and dry-mesic barrens. The mean coefficient of conservatism (c-value) is 4.3 for native species of plants. Native floristic quality index (FQI) is 46.7 and includes many highly conservative species, *including the spring ladies tresses* (*Spiranthes vernalis*, ST) and squirting cucumber (*Melothria pendula*, ST). Dedication of the proposed east buffer addition should be considered for the following qualifying features and/or reasons:

1. Permanent protection of 2.9 acres of NP buffer habitat with high restoration potential;
2. Verified extant populations of four state-listed species: Chuck-wills-widow (*Antrostomus carolinensis*, ST), Eastern narrowmouth toad (*Gastrophryne carolinensis*, ST), spring ladies tresses, and squirting cucumber;
3. Historic populations of three state-listed species: Loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*, SE), Northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*, federally threatened, SE), and Bewick's wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*, SE);
4. 103.6 acres of protected habitat for 37 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), including gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*) and 28 avian species that are confirmed as breeding on or proximate to the preserve; and
5. Supports the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan (IWAP), more specifically: the Forest and Woodlands, Farmland and Prairies, and Invasive Species Campaigns.

Within the proposed NP east buffer addition, the landowner reserved the right to:

1. Maintain a cleared path along the east property boundary;
2. Manage the old field communities as grassland or early successional habitat, or allow to succeed into woodland;
3. Manage white-tailed deer per the most recent IDNR wildlife regulations; and
4. Remove downed-woody debris (e.g., cedar slash) off the preserve from woodland communities and to decrease fuel loads prior to prescribed burning.

Commissioner Kessel asked if there were any concerns about the proposed parking lots and campsites.

Sierzega replied that there is not. These locations were selected within degraded areas, and their purpose is to maintain access.

It was moved by Commissioner Miraglia, seconded by Commissioner Kessel, and carried that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants preliminary approval for the dedication of Spivey's Valley Glade East Buffer Addition to Spivey's Valley Glade Nature Preserve, owned by the Spivey family, as described in the proposal presented under Item 11 of the agenda for the 251st Meeting.

(Resolution 2688)

**(251-12): Tazewell County – Coon Hill Prairie Nature Preserve, Preliminary Dedication**

This item was presented by Byron Paulsen.

The proposed 3.39-acre Coon Hill Prairie NP is owned by Gary and Robin Coon. The Coons originally enrolled the site in INPC's Natural Heritage Landmark Program (NHL #173) in November of 2000. Gary and Robin requested preliminary approval for dedication of the proposed NP, located in Tazewell County in the Grand Prairie Section of the Grand Prairie Natural Division. The site is recognized on the INAI (#129) for its Category I Grade B and C dry-mesic loess hill prairie. The proposed NP includes approximately 0.4 acres of dry-mesic loess hill prairie, 0.2 acres of reconstructed prairie, and 2.79 acres of dry-mesic upland forest located close to the Mackinaw River. The proposed NP supports several of the campaigns identified in the IWAP, including the Farmland and Prairie, Forest and Woodland, Invasive Species, and the Streams Campaigns. Reserved rights include the ability to maintain existing trails, remove trees that fall on the trails and use as firewood, maintain five bluebird nest boxes, allow deer management on the property (per the most recent IDNR wildlife regulations), and use of all-terrain vehicles for management purposes only.

Commissioner Evans asked about management goals for the hill prairie, particularly if there was a plan to expand the area.

Paulsen responded that management goals are to improve what already exists. Longer-term goals include increasing it down the slope.

Commissioner Carroll-Cunningham asked how many acres are considered Grade B.

Paulsen did not know off the top of his head, but his best estimate was 0.1 acres on the west end of the property.

It was moved by Commissioner Kessel, seconded by Commissioner Clay, and carried that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants preliminary approval for the dedication of Coon Hill Prairie Nature Preserve, owned by Gary and Robin Coon, as described in the proposal presented under Item 12 of the agenda for the 251st Meeting.

(Resolution 2689)

**(251-13): Cook County – Additions and Buffer Additions to Gensburg-Markham Prairie Nature Preserve, Final Dedication**

This item was presented by Kim Roman.

Gensburg-Markham Prairie Nature Preserve (NP) is in Markham, Illinois, and is owned by Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Illinois Chapter. The site supports a mosaic of high-quality prairie and wetland community's representative of the Chicago Lake Plain Section of the Northeastern Morainal Natural Division of Illinois. The prairie was subdivided into more than 1000 small residential parcels but was never developed. The original 95-acre nature preserve was dedicated in 1980, and the site has since grown to 181.7 acres in size with 14 subsequent nature preserve and buffer additions as new parcels were acquired over the decades. Gensburg-Markham Prairie is recognized on the INAI (#0400) for Category I Grade A and B dry-mesic sand prairie, mesic sand prairie, wet-mesic prairie, mesic prairie, and Grade B sedge meadow. It is the largest and highest quality prairie of the five sites that comprise the Indian Boundary Prairies in the Markham area. Gensburg-Markham Prairie was designated in 1987 as a National Natural Landmark by the National Park Service as the "largest and highest quality prairie in Illinois and large parts of adjacent states." The proposed dedicated acreage for both landowners combined is 9.74 acres of nature preserve additions, and 8.0 acres of nature preserve buffer additions, totaling 17.74 acres. Collectively, these proposed additions include portions of INAI communities and help complete a good preserve design for Gensburg-Markham Prairie Nature Preserve.

Northeastern Illinois University requested final dedication for 5.58 acres as nature preserve addition and 5.43 acres as nature preserve buffer addition. Preliminary approval was granted at the 250th INPC meeting (Resolution 2674). NEIU's acreage is parceled into small residential lots and vacated road rights-of-way within the preserve.

It was moved by Commissioner Rogner, seconded by Commissioner DeMauro-Roth, and carried that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants final approval for the dedication of Additions and Buffer Additions to Gensburg-Markham Prairie Nature Preserve, owned by Northeastern Illinois University, as described in the proposal presented under Item 13 of the agenda for the 251st Meeting.

(Resolution 2690)

TNC requested final dedication for 4.16 acres as nature preserve addition and 2.57 acres as nature preserve buffer addition. Preliminary approval was granted at the 250th INPC meeting (Resolution 2675). These proposed additions are similarly parceled into small residential lots and vacated street and alley rights-of-way throughout the site.

It was moved by Commissioner Clay, seconded by Commissioner Miraglia, and carried that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants final approval for the dedication of Additions and Buffer Additions to Gensburg-Markham Prairie Nature Preserve, owned by The Nature Conservancy, as described in the proposal presented under Item 13 of the agenda for the 251st Meeting.

(Resolution 2691)

**(251-14): Kankakee County – Addition to Carl N. Becker Savanna Nature Preserve, Final Dedication**

This item was presented by Kim Roman.

Carl N. Becker Savanna Nature Preserve is owned and jointly managed by TNC, Illinois Chapter, and IDNR. The site is in the Kankakee Sand Area Section of the Grand Prairie Natural Division. It was originally dedicated in 2009, with subsequent additions dedicated in 2010 and 2012. The proposed 2025 addition is approximately 60 acres in size and owned by TNC; preliminary approval was granted at the 250th INPC meeting (Resolution 2676). The previously dedicated acres owned by TNC and IDNR include the Leesville Savanna INAI site (#0638), with Category I and II features for high-quality sand savanna communities and for providing habitat for 16 state-endangered or threatened species. The proposed 60-acre addition is partially included on the INAI, includes habitat for two state-endangered plant species, and two state-threatened animal species, all of which have been recently observed on site. The proposed nature preserve addition provides habitat for numerous other wildlife SGCN, buffers high-quality INAI savanna communities, and contributes to good, defensible preserve design for the Carl N. Becker Savanna Nature Preserve. All uses and management activities are consistent with the Rules for Management and Public Use of Illinois Nature Preserves. The proposed 60-acre addition will increase the total acreage of this nature preserve to 215; protect a portion of the Leesville Savanna INAI site and habitat for rare, threatened, and endangered species; contribute to good preserve design of this site; and promote contiguity of natural habitat on this important landscape.

Commissioner Rogner commented on the picture of Carl Becker on the presentation slide, noting he was a hero and the first Heritage Division Chief at IDNR. He was a great naturalist and left us far too early.

It was moved by Commissioner Kessel, seconded by Commissioner DeMauro-Roth, and carried that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants final approval for the dedication of Addition to Carl N. Becker Savanna Nature Preserve, owned by The Nature Conservancy, as described in the proposal presented under Item 14 of the agenda for the 251st Meeting.

(Resolution 2692)

**(251-15): McHenry County – Addition and Buffer Addition to Barber Fen Nature Preserve as part of the Barber Farm and Fen Protection Plan, Final Dedication**

This item was presented by John Nelson.

The objective of the Barber Farm and Fen Protection Plan is to preserve the natural and agricultural heritage of the Aavang family property and encourage effective stewardship of the land in perpetuity. This objective will be accomplished by dedicating additional

lands into the existing Barber Fen NP administered by the INPC and by enrolling agricultural lands into a farmland preservation easement program administered by The Land Conservancy of McHenry County (TLC). The existing nature preserve was established in 1990 with the dedication of 17.2 acres by Rodney and Libbie Aavang. In 2013, the McHenry County Conservation District (MCCD) dedicated 49.2 acres as a nature preserve addition and another 19.6 acres as a buffer addition to Barber Fen. These dedications provide legal protection to the existing 86-acre Barber Fen Nature Preserve, which includes portions of the Category I and II Barber Fen INAI site (#1267), with high-quality sedge meadow and graminoid fen communities and the presence of two state-endangered plants, as well as a portion of the Nippersink Creek INAI site (#1506). The NP is in the Morainal Section of the Northeastern Morainal Natural Division. The farm has long been known locally as the Spring Hill Farm, which was established in 1849. Protecting the agricultural heritage of this landscape is of equal importance to the protection of its natural features. Together, these land protection strategies favor the natural features within the nature preserve, which are dependent on the groundwater resource of the area for their survival. Farmland preservation will prohibit land development and help protect the groundwater recharge system that sustains the natural communities found within the nature preserve.

The Aavang family requested final dedication of 4.9 acres as nature preserve addition and 24.4 acres as nature preserve buffer addition. Preliminary approval was granted at the 250th INPC meeting (Resolution 2677). The resulting acreage protected as a nature preserve by the Aavang family will be 46.5, and the total acreage of land under agricultural preservation will be 76.8. The combined land protected under this plan by the Aavang family will be 123.3 acres. The MCCD currently owns and manages 68.8 acres at Barber Fen Nature Preserve, which will bring the total land protection at this site to 192.1 acres.

Commissioner Rogner thanked the landowners for their dedication, support, and stewardship.

It was moved by Commissioner Kessel, seconded by Commissioner Miraglia, and carried that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants final approval for the dedication of Addition and Buffer Addition to Barber Fen Nature Preserve as part of the Barber Farm and Fen Protection Plan, owned by the Aavang family, as described in the proposal presented under Item 15 of the agenda for the 251st Meeting.

(Resolution 2693)

**(251-16): Peoria County – Addition to Forest Park South Nature Preserve, Final Dedication**

This item was presented by Angella Moorehouse.

The Pleasure Driveway and Park District of Peoria (Peoria Park District; PPD) requested final approval to dedicate 13.6 acres, surrounded on three sides by a nature preserve, as an addition to Forest Park South NP. Preliminary approval was granted at the 250th INPC meeting (Resolution 2678). The tract was acquired by PPD in late 2023 for the purpose of

protecting a key inholding within the current preserve. Forest Park South was dedicated in 1988 to preserve a large, forested block containing 90 acres of Grade B mesic upland forest located in the Illinois River Section of the Illinois River and Mississippi River Sand Areas Natural Division. Although the addition is not currently included in the 660-acre Forest Park INAI site (#0207), the condition of the forest community is much the same as the surrounding preserve, and was likely omitted due to private ownership rather than biological quality. Dedication of the addition will increase the size of Forest Park South NP to 148.22 acres, and together with Forest Park Nature Preserve (368.8 acres), situated immediately to the north, the two NPs will provide over 517 acres of contiguous forest habitat. The current preserve and addition are known to support at least 17 wildlife SGCN. The state-threatened species, black-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*) and cerulean warbler (*Setophaga cerulea*) have been noted from the preserve, but breeding has not been confirmed. Management objectives for the addition will be the same as for the current nature preserve: to promote public awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the natural world; to protect the natural environment and scenic beauty of Central Illinois; and to maintain the stability of the watershed.

It was moved by Commissioner Evans, seconded by Commissioner Kessel, and carried that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants final approval for the dedication Addition to Forest Park South Nature Preserve, owned by the Peoria Park District, as described in the proposal presented under Item 16 of the agenda for the 251st Meeting.

(Resolution 2694)

**(251-17): Rock Island County – Indian Bluff Hill Prairie Nature Preserve, Final Dedication**

This item was presented by Lorraine Foelske

The Rock Island County Forest Preserve District (RICFPD) requested final approval for the dedication of 1.48 acres as nature preserve and 2.78 acres as nature preserve buffer, totaling 4.26 acres, on the property known as Indian Bluff Hill Prairie. Preliminary approval was granted at the 250th INPC meeting (Resolution 2679). The site is in Rock Island County within the Indian Bluff Golf Course property, which is currently owned and managed by RICFPD. The area lies within the Mississippi River Section of the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois River Bottomlands Natural Division. Because of its ecological significance, the site was added to the INAI (#0139) in 1977 as Category I for having 0.8 acres of Grade A (very high quality) loess hill prairie and as Category II for supporting a healthy population of the downy painted cup (*Castilleja sessiliflora*), a state-endangered plant. Sixty-seven quality loess hill prairies remain in the state of Illinois, with only 30 of those in permanent protection. Loess hill prairies, such as Indian Bluff Hill Prairie, are limited to the Mississippi River and Illinois River Bluffs and host an assemblage of plants that thrive on deep loess. Forested acreage to the east of this hill prairie, categorized as dry-mesic upland forest, is included in the proposal as a nature preserve buffer. The site is accessible to the public via a gravel loop drive and a mowed path on the top end of the hill prairie.

Within the proposed Indian Bluff Hill Prairie Nature Preserve and Nature Preserve Buffer, RICFPD requested to reserve the following rights:

1. Maintain the gravel loop driveway;
2. Continue to use the gravel loop driveway for access and overflow parking;
3. Continue to maintain the mowed areas around the gravel loop driveway, along the ridge above the hill prairie, and to the utility box north of the gravel loop driveway;
4. Allow utility updates, which include a new electrical box in the same location as the old one, a generator next to the electrical box, and a propane tank near the parking area;
5. Maintain the 60' x 102' gravel pad to use for parking and staging of equipment; and
6. Restore the gravel pad (remove dumped gravel/material, regrade, and vegetate with INPC-approved species) as resources are available.

Staff of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission recommended final dedication of 1.48 acres as nature preserve and 2.78 acres as nature preserve buffer collectively as the Indian Bluff Hill Prairie Nature Preserve.

It was moved by Commissioner Carroll-Cunningham, seconded by Commissioner Clay, and carried that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants final approval for the dedication Indian Bluff Hill Prairie Nature Preserve, owned by the Rock Island County Forest Preserve District, as described in the proposal presented under Item 17 of the agenda for the 251st Meeting.

(Resolution 2695)

**(251-18): Signature Authority for INPC Springfield Program Staff**

This item was presented by Todd Strole.

The Commission has traditionally delegated signature authority for new staff or those who change roles within INPC. Most recently, the Commission reviewed and approved signature authority in 2022 and in 2016, prior to that. Upon the 2015 retirement of INPC's former Executive Director, Randy Heidorn, signature authority was approved for Kelly Neal as the Stewardship Project Manager to sign documents associated with INPC's Stewardship Program, including: permits; management plans; approvals for other routine stewardship or management actions; and memoranda representing INPC. Comments on IDNR Consultations (EcoCAT/Impact Assessment) and the Comprehensive Environmental Review Process (CERP). Management approvals for routine activities are defined as those activities approved by administrative rule that are consistent with INPC Guidelines or those activities that have been approved a minimum of three times by the Commission for specific management actions or at specific sites. Former Director Heidorn recommended the authority granted to the Stewardship Project Manager continue, while granting the same authority for the Nature Preserves Protection Program Manager position. The Commission granted approval for these authorities at the 222nd INPC Meeting in January 2016 (Resolution 2352).

With the hiring of Todd Strole as INPC's Executive Director in 2022, signature authority for INPC staff was again addressed at the 241st meeting on May 10, 2022. Authority was granted for Director Strole to sign documents that had been covered by the Commission Chair while the Executive Director position was vacant. Director Strole was also granted authority to sign documents as referenced above for the INPC Stewardship Program (Resolution 2562).

With the addition of two new staff to INPC's Stewardship Program in Springfield, it is recommended that Brooke Thureau and Nicholas Foster be granted signature authority for the following:

- Permits
- Management plans
- Approvals for other routine stewardship or management actions
- Memoranda representing INPC comments on IDNR's EcoCAT/Impact Assessment and CERP reviews.

To ensure consistency, continuity, and efficient workflow of INPC tasks, it is also recommended that signature authority be granted to INPC Defense Specialist, Valerie Njapa, to sign off on reviews and correspondence associated with the Defense Program, which is consistent with current practice, as well as for the above Stewardship Program tasks.

Commission Chair Parker asked for clarification on whether the approval for signature authority is for specific staff members or the positions they hold.

Strole responded that signature authority was been granted to specific individuals in the past, rather than the position. It may make more sense to approve signature authority for the position, but precedent is being followed. At this time, the individuals named above have been trained and possess the knowledge to make signatory decisions.

Commission Chair Parker followed up and asked if the signature authority carries if the individual were to change positions.

Strole replied that in this case, the authority only carries if the individual holds the position within INPC.

Commissioner Rogner asked in cases where the documents being signed are controversial and need to come before the Commission, if there are there provisions to initiate that.

Strole replied that staff try to never approve any action that has not come before the Commission at least three times. Staff do not want to surprise the Commission and past precedent is to bring anything that is new or controversial before them. An example of this is the usage of drones.

It was moved by Commissioner Evans, seconded by Commissioner Clay, and carried that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission grants approval of Signatory Authority for Nicholas Foster, Valerie Njapa, and Brooke Thureau as described in the proposal presented under Item 18 of the agenda for the 251st Meeting, including permits, management plans, approvals for other routine stewardship or management actions, and memoranda representing INPC comments on IDNR's EcoCAT/Impact Assessment and CERP reviews.

(Resolution 2696)

**(251-19): Election of INPC Officers**

Commissioner Clay presented the accepted slate of nominated INPC Officers proposed under Agenda Item 9.

It was moved by Commissioner Clay, seconded by Commissioner DeMauro-Roth, and carried that the Election of INPC Officers be approved for a 1-year term.

(Resolution 2697)

With the Commission's approval of this agenda item, Commission Chair Parker continues her role as Commission Chair, Commissioner Miraglia continues her role as Vice Chair, and Commissioner Kessel continues his role as Secretary.

**(251-20): Election of INPC Advisors and Consultants**

Commissioner Clay presented the accepted slate of nominated INPC Advisors under Agenda Item 9 for a 1-year term.

It was moved by Commissioner Miraglia, seconded by Commissioner Oplt, and carried that the Election of INPC Advisors be approved.

(Resolution 2698)

Commissioner Clay presented the accepted slate of nominated INPC Consultants proposed under Agenda Item 9.

It was moved by Commissioner Evans, seconded by Commissioner Kessel, and carried that the Election of INPC Consultants be approved for a 1-year term.

(Resolution 2699)

Commissioner DeMauro-Roth recused herself from voting on the Advisors and Consultants, as she is related to one of the Consultants.

**(251-21): Review of Closed Meeting Minutes**

This item was presented by Todd Strole.

In accordance with the Open Meetings Act, Commissioners must review closed minutes at least twice a year to determine if they must remain closed. The following meetings had

closed minutes and need to be reviewed: August 2, 2005; May 2, 2006; May 6, 2008; May 5, 2009; May 7, 2013; September 10, 2013; and September 10, 2019.

It was moved by Commissioner Kessel, seconded by Commissioner Clay, and carried that the following resolution be approved:

The Commission agrees that the closed meeting minutes from August 2, 2005; May 2, 2006; May 6, 2008; May 5, 2009; May 7, 2013; September 10, 2013; and September 10, 2019, remain closed, as described and in accordance with Item 21 of the agenda for the 241st Meeting.

(Resolution 2700)

**(251-22): Public Comment Period (3 minutes per person)**

The Prairie Rivers Network Herbicide Drift handout is provided in Attachment 3.

Consultant Kim Erndt-Pitcher provided a report on Prairie Rivers Network monitoring on herbicide damage in 2025. PRN observed evidence of herbicide drift at all 135 sites monitored across 30 counties which included 38 INPC sites. Evidence of decline is evident in many species, including oaks. The Commissioners received a handout illustrating several of the monitored sites, their symptoms of decline and the closest potential source of drift. She stated the need to keep this in the forefront of the Commission's mind, and shared that PRN is still working on this issue from a monitoring and policy perspective.

Commissioner DeMauro-Roth asked if the data was throughout the state.

Erndt-Pitcher replied yes, but most data provided here is from southern Illinois.

Commissioner Kessel asked if a digital copy could be provided.

Erndt-Pitcher replied yes.

Commissioner DeMauro-Roth asked how many sites will have been monitored when the data entry is complete.

Erndt-Pitcher responded that she is not sure. There were eight people statewide collecting data and it is not all documented.

Commissioner Miraglia asked Erndt-Pitcher to elaborate on the public awareness campaign.

Erndt-Pitcher responded that she and her colleagues are giving numerous presentations across the state to different groups. PRN also has released blogs, newsletters and has engaged with the Save Our Trees Coalition. She described spending six hours in the car with a reporter looking at herbicide damage. They have also given legislative tours for state representatives.

Commissioner Evans thanked Erndt-Pitcher and added that last month he attended a meeting in Iowa, where they documented damage to mature oak trees and suspected herbicide drift to be the cause.

Erndt-Pitcher responded that PRN has partnered with about nine states who are grappling with the same issues.

Randy Locke highlighted positive news from the Illinois State Geological Survey. He thanked the Commission for the approval of several survey directors as Consultants. He highlighted that the Commission and the State Geological Survey have been in partnership for the better part of three decades, especially related to groundwater quality assessment. They have entered into a new three-year agreement with INPC and IDNR to consider that work. They are also looking into geo-heritage and evaluating the geological significance of sites across the state.

**(251-23): Other Business**

No Other Business was presented.

**(251-24): Adjournment**

Commission Chair Parker commented on the INPC staff report and the listed 69 partners that staff have worked with. She reiterated this work is done together and thanked the INPC staff for their dedication and proactive effort to work with partners. She expressed her respect to Doll's points to address the threats to the Nature Preserves System and to request holding space in these meetings to have difficult conversations. She pointed toward Commissioner Rogner's comment to systematically understand the problem. When she requested that we remain solution focused and get beyond just talking about the threats. She emphasized the need to involve staff, partners, Consultants and volunteers to address the issue together.

Commission Chair Parker thanked Commissioner Clay, Commissioner Miraglia and Todd Strole for seeing the Commission through the new election process. She commented on the incredible group who have stepped forward, new and old, and reminded Commissioners that these are people who have stepped up to help. She also reminded the audience that these Consultants want to help everyone in the room, not just Commissioners.

It was moved by Commissioner Kessel, seconded by Commissioner DeMauro-Roth, and carried that the meeting be adjourned.

The 250th INPC Meeting was adjourned at 1:27 p.m.