

**ILLINOIS NATURE PRESERVES COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA**

February 2, 2026, 1:30 PM

Illinois Department of Natural Resources
One Natural Resources Way
Springfield, Illinois 62702
Lake Level Conference Room

Item 1: Meeting Purpose and Logistics

Todd Strole, Assistant Director
Illinois Department of Natural Resources

IDNR Assistant Director Todd Strole provided opening remarks. He commented on the educational nature of the special meeting with a focus on the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission's relationship with Tribal Nations. He mentioned the tribal relations and activities the Commission has engaged in over the last two years, such as tribal-led prescribed fire, reinterments, and dedicating land specifically to reinterment.

In addition, reinterment guidelines have been developed, which Kaleb Baker spoke more about. Strole stated these actions represent meaningful moments of progress with more room to grow. He noted that all the presentations of the day are a move toward that growth.

He introduced Courtney Eddy King, who first captured his attention during an IDNR webinar. He was impacted by what she had to say and wanted to bring her to speak with the Commissioners.

Courtney Eddy King is a citizen of the Peoria Tribe of Indians of Oklahoma who lives and works at the confluence of the Kansas and Wakarusa River Valleys in present-day Lawrence, KS; the homeland of many Tribes, including the Kansa (Kaw), Osage, Wichita, and Pawnee Peoples. Courtney grew up in Shawnee, KS and moved to Lawrence to attend Haskell Indian Nations University. She graduated from Haskell with a B.S. in Environmental Science and is currently the Program & Land Stewardship Manager for the USDA Tribal College Equity Grant and a master's student in the Department of Geography & Atmospheric Science at the University of Kansas.

Item 2: Call to Order, Roll Call, and Introductions

Commission Chair Michelle Parker called the meeting to order at 1:36pm and read the roll call.

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

Consultants Present: Deborah Stone, Amy Doll, Jo Fessett, Joe Roth, Randy Heidorn, Jeff Walk, Fran Harty, Alleen Betzenhauser and Cynthia Kanner

Others Present: Todd Strole, Brooke Thureau, Nick Foster, Sami Childerson, John Nelson, Kelly Neal, John Griesbaum, Valerie Njapa, Kevin Sierzega, Debbie Newman, Emily Taylor, Kaleb Baker, and Byron Paulsen, INPC; Heather Osborn, Ann Holtrop, Natalia Maass, Josh Nickleson, Mark Alessi, Cory Anderson, Leon Hinz, Justin Ramey and Dawn Cobb IDNR; Logan Pappenfort and Brooke Morgan, Illinois State Museum; Carey L. Mayer and CJ Wallace, State Historic Preservation Office; Courtney King, Haskell Indian Nations University; Rebecca Judd, Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation; Lindsey Keeney and Shreya Mahajan, Illinois Environmental Council; Randy Locke, Illinois State Geological Survey; Brad Hanzel, Prairie State Conservation Coalition; Mary Vandevord, Heartland Conservancy; Tristan Morena, Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves

Item 3: Rematriation of the Land at Haskell Indian Nations University

Courtney Eddy King presented this item – see Attachment 1.

Debbie Newman asked if the prairies were unplowed from thousands of years ago, or a mix.

King responded that it is somewhat unclear, but some sections are from thousands of years ago. Some have been converted to smooth brome grass and bluegrass. There is a mix, but some areas are true remnant.

Brooke Thureau commented on King's engaging and wonderful skills as a storyteller. She asked when King began to engage with her ancestry, having not grown up knowing her roots.

King answered that she did not grow up knowing her tribe. She knew she was Peoria, but not what that meant. It was not until she started attending high school in 2019 that she began to dabble in their roots, and then in 2020 hit the ground running on the reclamation work of her family's story.

King noted that she lost connection to her roots not long ago, just a few generations, when her grandmother attended Haskell. Then alcoholism and familial trauma occurred, so her family is mostly disconnected today. King used archives to obtain records and

read letters her grandmother had written to her family. Her relationship with the land has shaped her timeline and progress in the reclamation of her traditional ways.

Commissioner Kessel thanked King for her story and the work she has done. He asked if there has been any impact on the curriculum, and if there has been a shift in the administration's view of the land as an asset or teaching resource.

King stated that when she began her work, a lot of people did not understand the work she was doing. King kept being a squeaky wheel and has seen a recent shift in the administration. The administration is biased and does not include the prairie and wetland on its official maps. King stated that it has taken a lot of work to draw their attention to the land. King noted the value and opportunity to build an academic community around Haskell.

Kevin Sierzega applauded King's story about seeing honeysuckle and her decision to start cutting it back. He stated this is what it takes and asked King about bringing conservation to a broader circle, and if she has seen this work at other universities.

King replied that she has seen other universities maintain research plots, but she has not seen other universities maintain land for the sake of the betterment of the ecosystem. She stated this has mostly been student work, which ebbs and flows as students graduate. The biggest issue has been continuity.

King continued, in terms of reaching a broader public, she recommends making the knowledge more accessible. The academic community tends to keep things in an academic bubble, and King noted how they share what they learn. She noted her own work in hosting workdays, giving space to learn and understand, and opening conservation to everyone. King commented on her belief that direct experience is important.

Rebecca Judd thanked King for her inspiring presentation. She noted that the university is operated by the Bureau of Indian Education, which is heavily reliant on federal dollars. She asked how this impacted restoration.

King answered that they are grant-funded, and somehow, USDA has been able to protect the grant they fall under, so there have been no issues yet. She commented that there is no institutional funding for the restoration, so the funding is all "soft money" and unsustainable. King hoped she could work with the Haskell Administration to formalize funding and have this work become part of the university system.

Commission Chair Parker commented on King's work mentoring a student. She asked how students were engaged in generational work when the future seems bleak.

King replied that she tells people to focus on what they can directly shape and change the land. The students she works with are Indigenous, and the work they do involves traditions that require stewardship. She added that the students she works with choose to be part of the work and see the merit. King has been grateful to offer them the opportunities they sought.

Todd Strole thanked King for her time and marveled at all she has accomplished since 2020.

Item 4: INPC Guidance on Reinterment of Tribal Ancestral Remains and Artifacts

Kaleb Baker presented this item – see Attachment 2.

Commissioner DeMauro-Roth asked how the reinterment process is initiated. Who is the starting point? How does the process differ for established nature preserves and land and water reserves and newly proposed properties?

Baker responded in two parts. First, this process could be initiated by the Illinois State Museum if they were to be contacted by a tribe, a landowner who is interested, or if Commission staff think it is appropriate for the site. These instances apply to existing sites.

Baker stated that for sites moving forward, reinterment information will be in the management plan upon dedication or registration of the land.

Commission Chair Parker clarified that existing sites will be done by request, but all sites moving forward will be evaluated for reinterment.

Baker answered that not all sites would be required to have a reinterment plan. If the site is not appropriate for reinterment, such as a small cemetery, then a reinterment area would not be identified.

Commission Chair Parker asked if the assessment on whether a site is appropriate for reinterment is part of the dedication process.

Baker replied yes.

Commission Chair Parker asked if this process is only for IDNR land or if the guidelines extend to private land.

Baker replied that it was for any land, public or private. Tribes may have a preference to reinter on public land since they will allow access.

Commissioner Evans requested more detail on how these sites are not subject to the Freedom of Information Act.

Brooke Morgan answered that the location of archaeological site information is protected under the Archaeological and Paleontological Resources Protection Act. Reinterment sites are included. The locations are registered in the Illinois Inventory of Archaeological Sites and that information is protected from FOIA and cannot be disclosed under state law.

Commissioner Evans followed up. If a site is identified as appropriate for reinterment but no resources have been reinterred yet, is that protected?

Morgan replied that nothing is protected until reinterment occurs.

Commissioner Evans expressed concern over putting reinterment areas in management plans prior to burial plans if the information is not protected.

Morgan recommended including the site information right before an interment.

Commissioner Evans stated that it would be different than the current guidelines proposed, which are automatic rather than case-by-case.

Strole clarified that a management plan would only identify a large suitable area, not a specific point.

Valerie Njapa commented that the intent is not to include reinterment information in every management plan, rather only sites assessed to be appropriate.

Baker clarified that only sites that are a possibility will have reinterment guidelines.

Njapa clarified that every site will be considered, but not every site will be suitable.

Commission Chair Parker commented that moving forward, suitability will be assessed for each new dedication and registration. The guidelines will provide a footprint of reinterment.

Strole replied yes.

Commissioner Chair Parker asked if properties could be reopened for consideration after approval.

Baker replied that, as the guidelines are written, it does not separate past sites and future sites. As management plans are being refreshed, they could be reassessed.

Commissioner Chair Parker asked if the default is to include appropriate plots in management plans.

Baker replied that it is dependent on other factors and is not a requirement for all future dedications.

Commissioner DeMauro-Roth asked if these guidelines were more appropriate as a reserved right, rather than identifying a specific point before reinterment.

Kelly Neal stated the updated management plan begins the process for reinterment as an approved activity. Whether the site is new or over 30 years old, an updated management plan would address the management activity of reinterment.

Commissioner DeMauro-Roth asked if public entities, such as Forest Preserves or Park Districts, are required to have land set aside for reinterment.

Baker replied that there is no requirement for public or private landowners. There is only a requirement for a consultation and for the state to facilitate reinterment and repatriation.

Baker revisited Commissioner Evans' earlier question on FOIA and recommended a review of the language included in the Cultural and Archaeological Section of the management plan so that the predetermined area could not be seen by the public.

Morgan commented that maps are subject to FOIA and could point the public to where a reinterment might be.

Commissioner Miraglia asked about the timeline of assessing sites for reinterment. How long does it take to update management plans once a partner has been identified for reinterment?

Baker replied that management plans must be updated every five years. Neal replied that once the management plan is received for staff review, it should only take a day. The process that could take time is before submittal, such as working with the landowner and investigating the site. But once the management plan is written, it is very quick.

Commissioner Kessel commended Baker on his wonderful work on the project. He urged the Commission to use broad strokes as they move forward and reminded the room that the goal is to expand access, remove barriers, and allow repatriation as close to their intended site as possible. He hopes these guidelines will remove a level of bureaucracy and facilitate the expedited and respectful return of relatives to burial.

Consultant Joe Roth asked if the immunity from FOAI applied to non-state agencies, such as city government or park districts. How do we keep other agencies discreet?

Consultant Amy Doll followed up and asked about local governments discussing these matters in open meetings.

Baker responded that this is a concern he will investigate.

Commission Chair Parker replied, first thanking Commissioner Kessel for the reminder of the goal, which is to remove barriers and create access for tribes. She reiterated several previous discussion points, such as reserved rights, creating respectful access for tribes, and developing guidelines that will outlive the people in the room.

John Griesbaum asked how formal these guidelines are and if they will be developed into an administrative rule. He expressed concern that informal guidelines may be lost over time.

Baker replied that the intent would be handled similarly to vegetation guidelines, with some as caveats and allowances.

Consultant Randy Heidorn commented that management guidelines would suffice for formal guidance, rather than creating a new administrative rule. Management guidelines are already tied to the administrative rules.

Strole wrapped up the discussion with comments on the Open Meetings Act. He expressed the belief that the confidentiality of non-state entities could be dealt with by utilizing closed session rules in the Open Meetings Act, which all public entities are subject to.

Item 5: State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO): Overview

Carey Mayer and CJ Wallace presented this item- see Attachment 3.

Commissioner Rogner thanked them for the presentation. He commented on his time as a federal regulator, and the SHPO of the past was much more difficult to work with. He appreciated their gentler, more collaborative approach. He asked about the deregulatory nature of the current federal administration and whether Section 106 is under threat.

Carey Mayer replied that there was a hearing about Section 106 in Washington, D.C., this past year, for no discernible reason. No legislation was proposed, but the desire to streamline came up, which usually means reductions.

CJ Wallace commented on the relevance of SHPO to natural areas and their cultural significance as historical sites. The human construct of dedication makes these landscapes historically significant.

Commissioner Oplt asked about the threat of developing data centers. Could SHPO be a buffer?

CJ Wallace stated their office has received a lot of calls and emails regarding data centers. Unfortunately, agencies, individuals, and businesses ultimately decide what to do with their property. She stressed the importance of getting involved immediately when a project like that comes into the community. Go to town halls, public meetings, contact legislators,

and all the people who have the power to say no and make your voice heard.

CJ Wallace continued, stating that a lot of the time, they are left to resolve the adverse effects of those projects. She reiterated that businesses and individuals do have to go through the public process and listen to the community. If you don't want it in your community, you must do something about it.

Item 6: Cultural Resources Project at Salt Lick Point Land and Water Reserve

Logan Pappenfort presented this item – see Attachment 4.

Commissioner Miraglia thanked Pappenfort and commented that this is the first time since being on the Commission that she has heard an in-depth conversation and explanation about community engagement. She noted lessons from all over the world about not engaging the public about the appreciation of a natural area; it is a recipe for disaster.

Commissioner Miraglia asked why mounds do not receive the same protection as repatriated human remains.

Pappenfort answered that archeological sites receive the same protection. However, mounds are much more visible, and that creates an issue that you cannot just ignore. There is merit in identifying the mounds for the public to see, because they are so obviously visible. If you do not mark them, those who mean ill might be more inclined to cause harm. There is a balance in protection and public information.

CJ Wallace mentioned that Section 106 consultation (federal law) is required by the government process with tribes and other communities. But state law does not specify this, so it may be an important part that we should consider in how we, as an agency, choose to communicate with tribes during the consultation.

Pappenfort agreed wholeheartedly. In a perfect world, we would do the right thing for the right reason. Unfortunately, we do not live in that world. Something like Section 707 consultation (state law) has the potential to be a real act of good, especially in the midst of federal deregulation. He commented that we as the state have an obligation to do the right thing and make sure we are having conversations with our tribal partners.

Item 7: Adjourn

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

The Special Meeting was adjourned at 5:12pm.