

# ILLINOIS NATURE PRESERVES COMMISSION TWO HUNDRED FIFTIETH MEETING MINUTES

Vermilion County Conservation District  
22296-A Henning Road  
Danville, IL 61834

May 13, 2025, 10:00 a.m.

In-person meeting. A WebEx was not offered due to technical problems.

Todd Strole provided opening remarks. He thanked Vermilion County Conservation District (VCCD) for allowing the use of their beautiful facility, Gannett Outdoor Education Center. He noted VCCD is an active member in the Nature Preserves System and thanked them for their dedication. He introduced two new Commissioners, John Rogner and Connie Carroll-Cunningham. He noted their years of experience and value they bring to the Commission. He stated it is an honor to have them with the Commission and commented on the milestone of them starting with the 250<sup>th</sup> INPC meeting.

For the first time in nearly a decade, there is a table of Commissioners where each one is serving on a current term. He thanked the Executive Appointment Staff in the Governor's Office, who worked with him to gradually update the Commission members and preserve the processes and institutional knowledge of the Commission.

## **(250-1): Call to Order, Roll Call, and Introduction of Attendees**

Commission Chair Parker called the meeting to order at 10:13am and read the roll call.

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

Advisors Present: Dr. Joyce Hofmann, Alleen Betzenhauser, Marc Miller (Representative of Prairie Research Institute)

Consultants Present: Amy Doll, Kim Erndt-Pitcher, Jo Fessett, Fran Harty, Michelle Uting, Iza Redlinski, Jordan L. Gurneau

Others Present: Todd Strole; Kaleb Baker, Sami Childerson, Lorraine Foelske, John Griesbaum, Angella Moorehouse, Byron Paulsen, John Nelson, Debbie Newman, Kevin Sierzega, Kim Roman, Valerie Njapa, and Emily Taylor, INPC; Christina Feng, Natalia Maass, Dawn Cobb, Ann Holtrop, Logan Pappenfort, Eric Smith, Phillip Cox, and Morgan Wood, IDNR; Daniel Misch, The Nature Conservancy; Martha Lopez-Salazar, Northeastern Illinois University; Bob Aavang and Sarah Aavang, Landowners; Phil Borsdorf, Champaign County Forest Preserves; Randy

**(250-2): Adoption of Agenda**

Commissioner Evans made the motion to adopt the Agenda, seconded by Commissioner Oplt, and carried that the Agenda for the 250th Meeting be approved.

**(250-3): Approval of Minutes for the Special Meeting held on January 27, 2025 and for the 249th Meeting on January 28, 2025**

It was moved by Commissioner Rogner, seconded by Commissioner Oplt, and carried that the minutes of the Special Meeting and the 249th Meeting be approved.

Commission Chair Parker then read the Accomplishments Summary for the 249th Meeting:

*At the 249th Meeting of the INPC, held on January 28, 2025, at the Illinois Department of Natural Resources in Springfield, Illinois, legal protection was completed by the Commission for eight tracts of land totaling 413 acres. Four of these tracts are privately owned, one is publicly owned, and three are owned by not-for-profit organizations. The owners of the private sites donated the value of the protection agreements to the public. Four sites with five tracts were protected as Land and Water Reserves: Additions to Allendale Spring, Barefoot Ridge, Lexington, and Addition to Cedar-Draper's Bluff. Three sites were dedicated as Nature Preserves: Buffer Addition to Allendale Spring, Fountain Bluff, and Casper Bluff Nature Preserve and Nature Preserve Buffer.*

*There are now 422 dedicated nature preserves with 64,117 acres and 215 registered land and water reserves with 59,960 acres. Altogether, there are 637 sites totaling 124,077 acres protected in the Illinois Nature Preserves System.*

Commission Chair Parker commented on the scope of everything the Commission has accomplished, leading up to the 250<sup>th</sup> meeting. She noted how the Commission started as an idea and a group of people who fought for that idea, and now here we are with 124,077 acres protected. This is something to be proud of and expressed how proud she is to be a part of it.

**(250-4): Next Meeting Date and Location**

251	September 9, 2025	Byron Forest Preserve 7993 N River Rd Byron, IL 61010
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**(250-5): INPC Staff Report**

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 1.

Commission Chair Parker expressed gratitude to Todd Strole and INPC Staff for advancing relationships and partnerships with Tribal Nations. It was over a year ago that delegates from the Potawatomi Band delegation came to our 245<sup>th</sup> meeting and asked some tough questions that we could have shied away from. Instead, the Commission, staff and IDNR stepped up to meet those challenges. Commission Chair Parker then expressed her congratulations to the Department on the contract with the Wetlands Inventory.

**(250-6): IDNR Staff Report**

REPORT

Ann Marie Holtrop, Chief  
Division of Natural Heritage

Holtrop reported Natural Areas Stewardship Grant program is open for applications from May 1 to June 13, 2025.

The full IDNR Report is attached as Appendix II.

**(250-7): Endangered Species Protection Board Report**

REPORT

Dr. Joyce Hofmann  
Endangered Species Protection Board

The full ESPB Report is attached as Appendix III.

Commissioner Carroll-Cunningham asked how many species were added to the endangered species list.

Advisor Dr. Joyce Hoffman replied that 38 species were added between the threatened and endangered lists. She added that eight species were removed.

Consultant Amy Doll asked why they were removed.

Advisor Dr. Hoffman replied that while they like to remove species from the list because they have recovered, but that is not always the case. Most of the species were considered extirpated from the state or lost. But some were removed because they were recovered.

**(250-8): Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves Report**

REPORT

Amy Doll, Director

Friends of Illinois Nature Preserves

The full report is attached as Appendix IV.

**(250-9): Coles County – Addition to Warbler Bottoms North Land and Water Reserve, Registration**

This item was presented by John Griesbaum.

Warbler Bottoms North is a 232-acre natural area in Coles County that is owned and managed by Grand Prairie Friends. Grand Prairie Friends requested registration of 21.4 acres, more or less, as an addition to Warbler Bottoms North Land and Water Reserve (LWR). Warbler Bottoms North and the addition lie within the Grand Prairie Section of the Grand Prairie Natural Division in East Central Illinois. The LWR is situated in a forested corridor that extends for several miles along the Embarras River, from north of Lake Charleston to south of Fox Ridge State Park. Warbler Bottoms North protects and buffers about 8450 feet (1.6 miles) of the Embarras River and associated forest habitat. The LWR is found within the Warbler Woods Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI) site (#1585). Warbler Woods INAI includes Category I, II and III features for Grade B dry-mesic upland forest, occurrence of the state-threatened smooth softshell turtle (*Apalone mutica*), and containing one nature preserve and five land and water reserves, respectively. Protections for the Embarras River were extended and enhanced through registration of the addition. The Embarras River is known as a biologically significant stream by the INAI (#0950), providing habitat for several threatened or endangered species of fish and reptiles in addition to diverse concentrations of freshwater mussels. State and/or federally listed aquatic species include, but are not limited to, eastern sand darter (*Ammocrypta pellucidum*), smooth softshell turtle (*Apalone mutica*) and the mussels monkeyface (*Quadrula metanevra*) and snuffbox (*Epioblasma triquetra*). Both INAI sites provide habitat for several wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).

Grand Prairie Friends requested registration in perpetuity of the 21.4-acre addition. Registration of this site will protect numerous natural resources and benefit current and future visitors, researchers, and residents of Coles County by preserving the unique natural heritage of East Central Illinois.

Grand Prairie Friends reserved the following rights: In consultation with and approval by INPC staff, create a multi-modal trail that connects with other, nearby Grand Prairie Friends properties. The trail may accommodate hikers, bikers and ATV/UTV access (for management or emergency response purposes only). The total footprint will be no more than 15-20 feet wide and may comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The trail route will avoid impacts to high quality resources, steep slopes, highly erodible soils and any threatened or endangered species that currently occurs or may be discovered in the future.

Commissioner Evans asked what are the biggest management concerns that need addressed at the site.

Griesbaum answered that the site is owned by Grand Prairie Friends, who already manages the property. The biggest concerns are mesophication and controlling undesirable woody species. This site is managed in the larger Warbler Ridge management area.

Eric Smith asked if there are any Category I or II sites along the proposed 20-mile trail. And if there are not, are there plans to survey the area before trail construction?

Griesbaum replied yes. Grand Prairie Friends has a long history of preserving biodiversity, thus any areas that are sensitive or hold endangered species will be avoided. Most of the area where the trail will be built are heavily disturbed along road rights-of-way.

Consultant Amy Doll asked about who plans the inventories and determines where the trails go.

Griesbaum said it would be a heavily coordinated effort, as the proposed trail encompasses property owned by three different landowners. All stakeholders will be involved with a very transparent process.

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

The Commission grants approval for the registration of the Addition to Warbler Bottoms North Land and Water Reserve, owned by Grand Prairie Friends and as described in the proposal presented under Item 9 of the agenda for the 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2671)

**(250-10): Kankakee County – Okàn Savanna Land and Water Reserve, Registration**

This item was presented by Kim Roman.

Okàn Savanna is an approximately 60-acre natural area owned by the Community Development Corporation of Pembroke-Hopkins Park and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), Illinois Chapter, located in southeastern Kankakee County. The site is representative of the Kankakee Sand Area Section of the Grand Prairie Natural Division of Illinois. While the site is not currently on the INAI, its dry to dry-mesic sand savanna could be considered Grade B in quality and is a good candidate for inclusion on the INAI as a Category I site. Other natural communities present include mesic sand prairie and old field communities. The proposed Okàn Savanna Land and Water Reserve is one of the many natural areas in the Kankakee Sands contributing to the ecological significance of Pembroke Township, which supports the largest concentration of high-quality sand savannas in the Midwest. The site adjoins other natural lands in private ownership and

lies approximately 0.25 miles west of Sweet Fern Savanna LWR. Okàn Savanna provides habitat for a state-threatened reptile, regal fritillary butterfly (*Speyeria idalia*), and the state-endangered highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*). Okàn Savanna also provides habitat for many wildlife SGCN. Uses of the proposed land and water reserve must be compatible with the site's long-term conservation, and include the creation of a foot trail, hiking, nature observation, scientific study, archery hunting, collection of wild edibles and medicinal plants for personal use, removal of undesirable trees for firewood, and horses on approved trails. Okàn Savanna will be managed to sustain and improve its savanna and prairie natural communities, and the habitats of rare and endangered species which occur on site and in the area.

INPC Staff recommended permanent protection of 40 acres, more or less, of the proposed Okàn Savanna Land and Water Reserve owned by the Community Development Corporation of Pembroke-Hopkins Park.

Commissioner Evans asked if there were concerns with the horse trail and its effect on the sandy soil.

Roman replied yes and no. Local use is not a concern with neighbors occasionally using the trail. Roman would be concerned if people were to drive in with their horses and there would be dozens going through in a weekend. She noted plans for a multi-modal trail in a degraded area if funding ever becomes available.

Commissioner Carroll-Cunningham asked if the horse trail would be part of the multi-use trail.

Roman said possibly, and there would be meetings to work that out. She does not know if a bike trail and horse trail would be compatible. Community Development Corporation of Pembroke-Hopkins Park is a new organization that wants to be responsive to community needs so they would not make that determination without community involvement.

Commissioner Carroll-Cunningham asked if there are any other horse trails.

Roman replied no. She explained that almost any site you walk through in this area has visible horse trails but there is minimal damage from the amount of light horseback riding occurring.

Commissioner Rogner commented on the work he did 10 years ago when he was working in the Kankakee Sands region. He could not have imagined being where we are today and the astounding efforts by so many people. Many of those in the conservation community have spent a number of years protecting Pembroke because it is such a rare and diverse area. The Nature Conservancy, IDNR, Friends of Kankakee, and USFWS combined conserved a lot of important land. He credited Consultant Fran Harty for their efforts. He explained these efforts also resulted in a lot of backlash, which ultimately caused these organizations to take a step back. He gave great credit to Kim Roman, for working with and listening to the local community. He also gave a lot of credit to The Nature Conservancy for the same reason and for ensuring the desires of the local community were built into the plans, making them partners.

Roman thanked Commission Rogner and commented that she had a lot of help along the way.

Commissioner Evans asked if there were any differences in allowed uses between the two landowners.

Roman replied that TNC likely does not have interest in a horse trail, but Pembroke does.

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

The Commission grants approval for the registration of Okàn Savanna Land and Water Reserve, owned by the Community Development Corporation of Pembroke-Hopkins Park as described in the proposal presented under Item 10 of the agenda for the 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2672)

INPC Staff recommended permanent protection of 20 acres of the proposed Okàn Savanna Land and Water Reserve owned by The Nature Conservancy, Illinois Chapter.

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

The Commission grants approval for the registration of Okàn Savanna Land and Water Reserve, owned by The Nature Conservancy as described in the proposal presented under Item 10 of the agenda for the 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2673)

**(250-11): Cook County – Additions and Buffer Additions to Gensburg-Markham Prairie Nature Preserve, Preliminary Dedication**

This item was presented by Kim Roman.

Gensburg-Markham Prairie Nature Preserve (NP) is located in Markham, Illinois and is owned by Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) and The Nature Conservancy, Illinois Chapter. The site supports a mosaic of high-quality prairie and wetland communities 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, and mesic prairie, and Grade

B sedge meadow. It is the largest and highest quality prairie of the five sites which 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 good preserve design for Gensburg-Markham Prairie Nature Preserve.

Martha Lopez-Salazar, landowner representative of Northeastern Illinois University, thanked the Commission and Kim Roman for considering this dedication.

Commission Chair Parker asked about the map regarding the strip of land not included.

Roman replied that one part of the area is a residence.

Commissioner DeMauro-Roth, familiar with the property, also commented on the in-holding as residential property.

Daniel Misch replied that there is another in-holding that The Nature Conservancy is working on acquiring. He added that there is the never-ending issue of TNC not being able to pay market rate for property but there are plans to acquire the adjacent land.

Commissioner Evans asked if there were any infrastructure needing to be removed.

Roman replied there are utility poles, sewage lines and drainage ditches. She noted that she advocated with ComEd to remove utility infrastructure not in use.

Commissioner DeMauro-Roth commented on the active sewer line but added that most of the ditches were never developed and have since been plugged, leaving the water mainly on site.

Commissioner Rogner asked if the City of Markham is in favor of the nature preserve.

Daniel Misch replied that the City of Markham is getting more onboard as time passes. Their current Economic Development Director is interested in portraying the prairie as an asset to residents. He added there is an ongoing discussion about renaming the property with the community’s involvement. The Nature Conservancy is working on a good relationship with the city in different ways.

Northeastern Illinois University requested preliminary dedication of 5.58 acres as nature preserve addition and 5.43 acres as dedicated nature preserve buffer addition. NEIU’s acreage is parceled into small residential lots and vacated road rights-of-way within the preserve.

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

The Commission grants preliminary 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 11 of the agenda for the 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2674)

The Nature Conservancy requested preliminary dedication of 4.16 acres as nature preserve addition and 2.57 acres as nature preserve buffer addition. These proposed additions are similarly parceled into small residential lots throughout the site and vacated street and alley rights-of-way.

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

The Commission grants preliminary 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 11 of the agenda for the 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2675)

**(250-12): Kankakee County – Addition to Carl N. Becker Savanna Nature Preserve, Preliminary 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 located 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. 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, and it also 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, defendable 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 acres; 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.

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 Addition to Carl N. Becker Savanna Nature Preserve, as described in the proposal presented under Item 12 of the agenda for the 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2676)

**(250-13): McHenry County – Addition and Buffer Addition to Barber Fen Nature Preserve as part of the Barber Farm and Fen Protection Plan, Preliminary 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 Nature Preserve administered by the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission and by enrolling agricultural lands into a farmland preservation easement program administered by The Land Conservancy of McHenry County (TLC). The existing Barber Fen 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 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 segment of the the Nippersink Creek INAI site (#1506). The nature preserve is located 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 upon 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 preliminary dedication of 4.9 acres as nature preserve addition and 24.4 acres as nature preserve buffer addition. With final approval, the resulting acreage protected as nature preserve by the Aavangs 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 brings the total land protection at this site to 192.1 acres.

Bob Aavang and Sarah Aavang thanked John Nelson for his help, knowledge and time and the Commission for their consideration.

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

The Commission grants preliminary approval for the dedication of Addition and Buffer Addition to Barber Fen Nature as described in the proposal presented under Item 13 of the agenda for the 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2677)

**(250-14): Peoria County – Addition to Forest Park South Nature Preserve, Preliminary Dedication**

This item was presented by Angella Moorehouse.

The Pleasure Driveway and Park District of Peoria (Peoria Park District; PPD) requested preliminary approval to dedicate 13.6 acres, surrounded on three sides by nature preserve, as an addition to Forest Park South Nature Preserve. The tract was acquired by the 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 Nature Preserve to 148.22 acres and, with Forest Park Nature Preserve (368.8 acres), situated immediately to the north, will provide over 517 acres of contiguous forest habitat. 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.

Commissioner Carroll-Cunningham asked about land use prior to 2013 when the Park District acquired it.

Moorehouse replied there was no land use, as the terrain is too steep.

Eric Smith commented that if it were too steep to be grazed or logged, how is the young forest accounted for.

Moorehouse replied that she believes it was logged at some point and has witnessed evidence of that.

Consultant Jordan Gurneau asked if there were any opportunity for maple tree tapping.

Moorehouse said the site is inaccessible and commented the Peoria Park District has property not in the Nature Preserve System more well suited for that use for educational purposes. The Peoria Park District is interested in preserving this property as much as possible.

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

The Commission grants preliminary approval for the dedication of Addition to Forest Park South Nature Preserve, as described in the proposal presented under Item 14 of the agenda for the 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2678)

**(250-15): Rock Island County – Indian Bluff Hill Prairie Nature Preserve, Preliminary Dedication**

This item was presented by Lorraine Foelske.

The Rock Island County Forest Preserve District (RICFPD) requested approval for the preliminary 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. 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 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. Maintain the 60' x 102' gravel pad to use for parking/staging equipment, and
5. 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 preliminary dedication of 1.48 acres of nature preserve and 2.78 acres of nature preserve buffer as the Indian Bluff Hill Prairie Nature Preserve.

Consultant Amy Doll asked why this is being brought forth now if it has been on the Commission's radar for a long time.

Foelske commented that Moorehouse had already laid the groundwork for this site and built the relationship with The Rock Island County Forest Preserve District. When Foelske took over the county, the resources and time were available for her to move it forward.

Eric Smith commented that it is interesting this land was not protected before the INAI listing when they had the opportunity.

Moorehouse added they did not know what they had. Before Foelske, there had never been staff in the Quad Cities to dedicate time and resources.

Commissioner Clay noted this is a great learning opportunity considering this sites' visibility to the public.

Commissioner Kessel asked about engaging golfers in conservation. There is a golf course in Evanston that engages its golfers in restoration and they have started converting some of the golf course to natural areas. It may be worth bring this up with the Forest Preserve District.

Commissioner Kessel continued, noting the missed opportunity to identify a cultural resource in the Sauk Trail. There are not many parts of the Sauk Trail that look like that with the bluffs. It may be worth engaging the Forest Preserve District about these assets.

Foelske answered that discussions about signage and highlighting the trail have occurred.

Commissioner Clay expressed the hope to see many more presentations from Foelske and commended her on a great first presentation.

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

The Commission grants preliminary approval for the Indian Bluff Hill Prairie Nature Preserve as described in the proposal presented under Item 15 of the agenda for the 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2679)

**(250-16): Cook County – Addition and Buffer Addition to Busse Forest Nature Preserve, Final Dedication**

This item was presented by John Nelson.

Preliminary approval was granted for this proposed nature preserve expansion at the 249<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. At this meeting, the Forest Preserves of Cook County (FPCC) requested final approval to expand their existing 454-acre Busse Forest Nature Preserve (BFNP) by dedicating 493 acres as nature preserve

addition and 274 acres as nature preserve buffer addition. This will expand Busse Forest Nature Preserve to 1,221 acres. Busse Forest Nature Preserve and the proposed additions are part of a 3,542-acre block of land owned by the FPCC along Salt Creek in northern Cook County located within the Morainal Section of the Northeastern Morainal Natural Division. BFNP was added to the INAI (#0534) in 1978 as a Category I site for having Grade A and B northern flatwoods surrounded by high quality mesic upland forest, dry-mesic woodland and shrub swamp as well as former agricultural lands; and as a Category II site for state-listed plant species. Listed plants known from BFNP include Tuckerman's sedge (*Carex tuckermanii*), downy false Solomon's seal (*Polygonatum pubescens*), purple-fringed orchid (*Platanthera psychodes*), dwarf raspberry (*Rubus pubescens*), and marsh speedwell (*Veronica scutellata*). BFNP was dedicated as the third nature preserve in 1965 along with 10 other FPCC sites. These FPCC nature preserve dedications represent the beginning of the Illinois Nature Preserve System in Illinois, with the passage of the Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act occurring less than two years prior in 1963. Today, the Illinois Nature Preserve System consists of over 420 nature preserves covering more than 64,000 acres. With final approval of these additions, Busse Forest Nature Preserve will be the 7<sup>th</sup> largest nature preserve in the Illinois Nature Preserve System.

Commissioner Evans said he loved to see these larger landscape protection efforts.

Nelson agreed, especially in the city environment where there is no room to grow.

Commissioner Kessel recused himself due to his current employment with the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

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

The Commission grants final approval for the dedication of Addition and Buffer Addition to Busse Forest Nature Preserve, as described in the proposal presented under Item 16 of the agenda for the 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2680)

**(250-17): Jersey County – Chautauqua Prairie Nature Preserve, Final Dedication**

This item was presented by Debbie Newman.

The proposed Chautauqua Prairie Nature Preserve is a 42.89-acre site comprised of two parcels located in the bluff corridor between Chautauqua and Grafton, in Jersey County in the Glaciated Section of the Middle Mississippi River Border Natural Division. The property contains nearly all the remaining unprotected portion of the former 109-acre Chautauqua Prairie INAI site (#0964), now currently known as the Principia Hill Prairies West-Chautauqua INAI site for Category I Grade A, B, and C loess hill prairie, and as Category II for a state-listed reptile. At least three other known state-listed species occur at the site. The proposed nature preserve contains approximately two acres of Grade A

and B loess hill prairie, and 40 acres of dry and dry-mesic upland forest connected to a much larger block of several hundred acres of mature forest. The site also contains Grade A limestone cliff community that includes Outstanding Exposures of the Fern Glen Formation limestone. The two parcels comprising the proposed nature preserve lie adjacent to the 430-acre Palisades Nature Preserve and other sites protected with conservation easements. The properties are owned by the Great Rivers Land Trust (GRLT), who has actively worked to protect the entire Chautauqua Prairie INAI site and negotiated the purchase of the Palisades site for preservation. The GRLT also holds a conservation easement on the proposed nature preserve. The preservation of this site accomplishes important conservation goals for the area. With a large complex of protected lands in the area, the Chautauqua Prairie parcel is a key piece in the efforts by GRLT, INPC and partners to preserve the ecologically important Mississippi River bluff corridor along Route 100. Preliminary approval was granted for Chautauqua Prairie Nature Preserve at the 249<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission.

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

The Commission grants final approval for the dedication of Chautauqua Prairie Nature Preserve, as described in the proposal presented under Item 17 of the agenda for the 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2681)

**(250-18): Lake County – Addition and Buffer Addition to North Dunes Nature Preserve, Final Dedication**

This item was presented by John Nelson.

IDNR requested final approval for dedication of a 91.4-acre addition and 138.6-acre buffer addition to North Dunes Nature Preserve, 230 acres in total. The existing 816-acre nature preserve is owned and managed by IDNR. The proposed additions are located within the Lake Michigan Dunes Section of the Northeastern Morainal Natural Division and are part of Illinois Dunes North INAI site (#1066). These additions will provide protection to 14 INAI Category I high-quality Grades A and B natural communities, including beach, foredune, panne, mesic prairie, wet prairie, dry-mesic sand savanna, sedge meadow, freshwater marsh, graminoid fen, Great Lake, and dry-mesic, mesic, wet-mesic, and wet sand prairie. The Lake Michigan Panne natural community is globally rare and has rare plant assemblages. The INAI is also designated as Category II due to the presence of numerous federally and state-listed species. Twelve state-listed species, one of which is also federally listed, have been recorded from within the boundaries of the proposed additions. Protection of this area will strengthen the resiliency of the existing nature preserve and the multitudes of additional rare species found there. The area is recognized as part of a Conservation Opportunity Area by the Illinois Wildlife Action Plan, is a critical region of the Lake Plain Coastal Restoration Partnership, contains wetlands recognized to be of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, and is recognized in the Illinois Environmental

Protection Agency's Kellogg/Dead Dog Creek Watershed Plan, the Upper Mississippi/Great Lakes Water Bird Conservation Plan, and the Chicago Wilderness Biodiversity Recovery Plan. The proposed additions will contribute significantly to national and regional biodiversity, preserve coastal wetland ecosystems, and provide critical habitat for declining plant and animal species. It also serves as a critical avian, mammalian (e.g., bats), and invertebrate (butterflies, dragonflies) migration corridor. Reserved rights include the right to maintain existing trails, allow pets in accordance with the park's pet policy, manage deer, wildlife diseases, and nuisance wildlife, and perform hydrological maintenance, restoration, or alteration. Upon approval, these additions to North Dunes Nature Preserve will bring the total acreage of protected land at this site to 1046 acres. Preliminary approval was granted for these proposed additions at the 249<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission.

Commissioner Rogner asked about the shore protection that IDNR built.

Nelson replied there is heavy shoreline erosion at this site.

Commissioner Rogner asked if the protection has been in long enough to show if it is effective.

Nelson replied there were unforeseen issues. An almost glacial amount of sand was brought in, and it should be easy to understand that sand is going to move around. Is it going to do exactly what we said it would do? Probably not. Are we going to say it was 100% successful? Probably not. It is possibly 90% successful. He noted something had to be done with the rate of erosion that was occurring. It is now a big destination for recreation. Site staff have expressed more concerns about the recreational attraction side rather than the ecology side.

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

The Commission grants final approval for the dedication of Addition and Buffer Addition to North Dunes Nature Preserve, as described in the proposal presented under Item 18 of the agenda for the 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2682)

**(250-19): Pope County – Addition and Buffer Addition to Spivey's Valley Glade Nature Preserve, Final Dedication**

This item was presented by Kevin Sierzega.

The Spivey family requested final approval for the dedication of 18 acres of nature preserve and 68.2 acres of nature preserve buffer, totaling 86.2 acres, as the Addition and Buffer Addition to Spivey's Valley Glade Nature Preserve in northeastern Pope County, Illinois. The site is in the Lesser Shawnee Hills Section of the Shawnee Hills Natural Division of Illinois. Spivey's Valley Glade Nature Preserve received final

approval for dedication as an Illinois nature preserve at the 157<sup>th</sup> INPC meeting in 1998. The proposed nature preserve additions comprise 6.7 acres of Grade B dry-woodland and 11.3 acres of Grade A and B dry-mesic woodland. This protects the entirety of the Category I acreage in the Spivey Valley Glade INAI site (#1526, Categories I, II, and III). The nature preserve buffer addition includes 4.5 acres of Grade C dry-woodland and 63.7 acres of old field communities of varying successional stages and quality. Collectively, this acreage buffers the Category I features. Thirty-three of these acres are comprised of pasture largely dominated by native forbs and grasses. The remaining old field acreage was planted with young oaks 25 years ago. The proposed nature preserve additions coupled with the existing nature preserve will protect 101.2 acres of natural lands in perpetuity. The site resides within the East Shawnee Conservation Opportunity Area.

Dedication of the proposed nature preserve, and nature preserve buffer additions was considered for the following qualifying features and/or reasons:

1. Permanent protection of 18 acres of Category I high-quality natural communities within INAI #1526 including Grade B dry-woodland and Grade A and B dry-mesic woodland;
2. Verified extant populations of two state-threatened species: Chuck-wills-widow (*Antrostomus carolinensis*) and Eastern narrow-mouthed toad (*Gastrophryne carolinensis*);
3. Historic populations of three listed species: state-endangered loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*), Bewick's wren (*Thryomanes bewickii*) and federally threatened and state-endangered Northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*);
4. Provides 86.2 additional acres of habitat for 37 SGCN including gray bat (*Myotis grisescens*) and 28 avian species that are confirmed as breeding on or proximate to the preserve; and
5. Supports various Illinois Wildlife Action Plan campaigns.

Within the proposed nature preserve addition, the landowner reserved the right to:

1. Manage white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*; INPC 2005) per the most recent Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) wildlife regulations, and
2. Remove downed-woody debris (e.g., cedar slash) off the preserve from glade and woodland communities and to decrease fuel loads prior to prescribed burning.

Within the proposed nature preserve buffer addition, the landowner reserved the right to:

1. Maintain mowed paths north of the NP, and around the two ponds,
2. Maintain an existing mowed primitive camping location,
3. Construct an up to four-car parking area at a pre-determined location to ensure access to the site in the future,
4. Allow an elderly horse to lightly graze a 10-acre section of pasture within the old field community until it passes away,
5. Manage the old field communities as grassland or early successional habitat, or allow to succeed into woodland,
6. Construct vernal wetlands in the old field communities,
7. Manage white-tailed deer per the most recent IDNR wildlife regulations, and
8. Remove downed-woody debris (e.g., cedar slash) off the preserve from woodland communities and to decrease fuel loads prior to prescribed burning.

Preliminary approval for these additions was granted at the 248<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission.

Commissioner Evans commented that it was a pleasure to spend time with the Spiveys and discuss the glade with them. He was blown away by their dedication and heart and was happy was to see this site presented.

Sierzega agreed and noted he would love to do a field trip at this site the next time the Commission is down in southern Illinois.

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

The Commission grants final approval for the dedication of Addition and Buffer Addition to Spivey's Valley Glade Nature Preserve, as described in the proposal presented under Item 19 of the agenda for the 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2683)

**(250-20): Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Consultant Appointment Guidance and Process**

This item was presented by Todd Strole.

At the 248<sup>th</sup> INPC Meeting, the Consultant Elections were put on hold for the sake of clarifying the Consultant role, qualifications, and selection process. A Special Meeting was held on January 27, 2025, to focus on this, and topics discussed in detail included areas of expertise, expectations, qualifications, general guidance, and process. At the 249<sup>th</sup> INPC Meeting on January 28, 2025, a slate of Consultants was nominated and elected to serve until September 2025. The discussion from the Special Meeting resulted in the development of the document titled, *Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Consultant Appointment Guidance and Process*. With approval of this document at the 250<sup>th</sup> INPC Meeting, the new process will be implemented for Consultant Appointments beginning with the 251<sup>st</sup> INPC Meeting on September 9, 2025.

Strole noted the need to make the guidance brief, broad and flexible over time to adapt to future needs and changes. He explained the process will begin between this meeting and the next. The next slate of Consultants will be presented to the Commissioners prior to the 251<sup>st</sup> meeting and any concerns or changes will be communicated to the Chair of the Committee of the Whole.

Commission Chair Parker added a few thoughts about the broader question on how to "open up the room" of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. As we asked how to open the room, we asked ourselves how people enter the room and discovered there was really no process for new Consultants with the Commission. It had really become an inherited, assumed process over the years.

Commission Chair Parker noted the need and opportunity to review the Consultant process. She highlighted two points on the Consultant guidance document:

- 1) Collectively, Consultants should help the Commission see a more complete context surrounding Commission issues and ensure a common-ground approach. Commission Chair Parker stressed the need for multiple perspectives.
- 2) Consultants should be able and willing to express divergent views, especially in situations where INPC staff and Advisors are not able to do so. Commission Chair Parker reiterated the need for new, fresh perspectives and avoiding the Commissioner becoming an echo chamber.

Commission Chair Parker went on to say that as Todd Strole mentioned, the original document was much longer and was intentionally narrowed down so in the future this guidance will still be useful. To that point, looking to the staff in the room, these Consultants are for the INPC staff as well. They are available for the Commissioners and staff. She encouraged staff to be vocal about their needs.

Commission Chair Parker commented on the need to ensure reciprocity is built into these roles. This is something that is still being considered for the Consultant and Advisor role and she noted this is not forgotten, and there is more work to do.

Commissioner Kessel added he would like to see a section about resources available to Consultants to make it more accessible.

Todd Strole replied yes and noted for clarity that Consultants can be reimbursed for travel and lodging related to participation in the meetings.

Commission Chair Parker clarified the motion would be passed with the added exception that a section on resources will be added to the process document.

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

The Commission grants approval for Illinois Nature Preserves Commission Consultant Appointment Guidance and Process, as described in the proposal presented under Item 20 of the agenda for the 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2684)

**(250-21): 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 DeMauro-Roth, 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 250th Meeting.

(Resolution 2685)

**(250-22): Public Comment Period (3 minutes per person)**

Todd Strole presented remarks on the milestone of the 250<sup>th</sup> INPC Meeting. He commented that every meeting is special. He cannot recall ever attending one where there wasn't something that "felt" special about it. Today was no different, but maybe it felt even more special. He shared some notes he had taken through the duration of the meeting. Today is the 250<sup>th</sup> meeting and we have all Commissioners sitting on a current term and the presence of partnerships in the room, and during the presentations shows we do not do this as a Commission alone. We do this holding hands with partners, and that is important to note. He noted his gratitude to Amy Doll for naming the volunteers, who are not just people but people with names who do meaningful work. We heard again and again today how these volunteers play such an important role. We could not do it without them. We had several landowners in the room, private and organizational. Prairie Research Institute was here in force, holding a large presence. He noted PRI is an important academic partner and one who we work closely with.

Todd Strole drew attention to Mary Kay Solecki, a veteran INPC staff member, who led the field trip the day before the meeting. There were many Consultants in the room, possibly the most who have ever attended. Progress was made upon many of the iconic sites in the Nature Preserve System. They continue to grow and that is a big deal. He noted Lorraine presenting her first site at a Commission meeting, showing juxtaposition in her beginning with the presence of veteran staff.

Todd Strole said all that is to say, this feels right. He referenced Commission Chair Parker's earlier comments and noted that we want to open the door, let people in and get things done today. He expressed his hope that we all found the day encouraging and inspirational, and inspirational enough to go out and keep that interest up with others, whether that is a volunteer, landowner or academic institution. This is not just the Commission's work. This is the Natural Areas Community work, with the Commission playing a specific role.

**(250-23): Other Business**

Commissioner John Rogner discussed the Brandon Road Interbasin Project. This project is designed to prevent invasive carp from swimming out of the Illinois River into the Great Lakes system through the Brandon Road Lock and Dam. Rogner and many others have spent their careers working on this project. Strategically, this

location is the perfect place to create a barrier between the two systems because of the infrastructure already present. Rogner explained the project will build a system of deterrents, such as bubbles, sound and electricity, while the lock is open periodically throughout the day. The project is cost-shared between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who committed to pay 90%, and the States of Illinois and Michigan, who will pay 10%. This still leaves Illinois responsible for \$100 million dollars.

The Brandon Road Project's relationship to the Commission is slightly tangential in that there may not be direct impact, but we do have a series of nature preserves along Lake Michigan. Additionally, we want to promote and invest in conservation efforts that promote biodiversity and ecosystem integrity. If these invasive carp were able to get into the Great Lakes, the effects would be potentially devastating.

All the funding fell into place through the Biden Administration's Bi-partisan Infrastructure Law, through which the funds were appropriated to complete the project. The states, Illinois and Michigan, have their full amount of funding ready to begin the Brandon Road Project. The State of Illinois' is responsible for purchasing the land the project will be built on.

The current Trump Administration put a freeze on incoming infrastructure funds, bringing the Brandon Road Project to a halt. Illinois could have continued the project by purchasing the land, but Governor Pritzker demanded commitment to the project from the Corps of Engineers and other federal partners before spending the funds to protect Illinois taxpayer interests. The Governor informed the Trump Administration in February that the project would not continue until Illinois had the reassurance of the federal funds.

Recently, in May, the Trump Administration released a memorandum stating they will provide the funding and directed all involved federal agencies to direct full resources to get the Brandon Road Project moving.

Commissioner John Rogner thanked Governor Pritzker and requested the Illinois Department of Natural Resources provide periodic updates to the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission and keep them informed on the progress of the project. He noted the Commission is prepared to support the project in any way it can.

Commission Chair Parker thanked Commissioner Rogner for his comments. She noted her own experience in informing the public about invasive carp during her time at Shedd Aquarium.

**(250-24): Adjournment**

It was moved by Commissioner Rogner, seconded by Commissioner Evans, and carried that the meeting be adjourned.

The 250th INPC Meeting was adjourned at 3:20 p.m.