

A Year in Review

One year ago this month, I was appointed director of the Department of Natural Resources by Governor Pat Quinn. Reflecting on a remarkable year, I am grateful to the dedicated staff who kept the agency afloat during difficult times, and for the strong constituent voices that continue to emphasize the importance of preserving, protecting and implementing sound management practices for Illinois' natural and cultural resources.



Two inaugural highlights set the stage for what became a productive year: Governor Quinn announced Feb. 25, 2009 that all Illinois state parks closed by the previous administration were being immediately reopened. Also, hunting and fishing license monies swept from the DNR budget were restored on Feb. 5th, my first day on the job.

We didn't stop there. Additional moves included:

- A return to professional management staff with the appointment of myself and John Rogner, a biologist with more than 25 years of experience with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Recently, Dr. Jim Herkert, formerly a biologist with the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board and a scientist with The Nature Conservancy, joined DNR as the Director of the Office of Resource Conservation, guiding the agency's forestry, fisheries, wildlife and natural heritage programs.

- Town meetings were conducted throughout the state, where we heard from our constituents what they consider to be our most pressing issues. At one meeting, more than 130 different constituent groups were represented.

- After a six-year absence, Illinois has a renewed presence on the national level on the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

- Three offices with important customer/constituent service functions have been combined into an Office of Strategic Services. This restructuring will allow the agency to improve our customer services, and focus on our goal of recruitment and retention for outdoor activities.

- After several years of severe budget cuts, we were fortunate this year that we were able to hold our ground, and even got a little back, on the agency's budget. Staff work tirelessly to ensure that critical services receive adequate funding.

- Conservation Congress, a long-term constituent input process, was reinstated in a more meaningful format that was less time consuming for constituents and agency personnel. Three discussion topics were formulated: funding, youth recruitment and retention and public access to recreational lands. The new format allowed interested persons to submit input through a variety of means, including attending one of the 13 meetings held around the state and participating in an Internet survey (6,075 respondents). Others provided comments on the Conservation Congress documents via the Internet or attended the Conservation Congress held in Springfield on Oct. 24-25, 2009.

We've made incredible headway in 12 short months, and the momentum will create additional changes over the next few months.

- Modest fee increases will restore some of the funding lost in recent years. With this revenue increase, DNR will hire professional resource managers to work on turkey, deer, upland/grassland game and other management areas.

- DNR will hire an Access Program coordinator who will undertake a variety of ideas and recommendations brought forward by the public. One of

the top issues presented by Conservation Congress participants, as well as more than 6,000 citizens responding to a recent online survey, is the need for increased access to the outdoors.

- Within the agency, a Private Lands and Watershed Division will be established. With more than 96 percent of the state in private ownership, working with landowners presents the best opportunity to effect significant changes on the ground.

- Another top priority of Conservation Congress was youth recruitment and retention services. Several educator positions will be created and filled, with staff working to engage youth, educators and parents in lifestyles that revolve around our natural resources.

Our work is far from complete. I vow to continue to rebuild the level of trust our constituents place in DNR. I promise to uphold our responsibilities as stewards of our shared natural resources—and to the taxpayers supporting this effort. We will work cooperatively to provide increased access to Illinois land while preserving, managing and protecting our resources. DNR will maintain open lines of communication for all during this push forward.

One year after my appointment, I remain even more dedicated to the mission, guided by a philosophy of personal conscience. I continually ask myself one question: "What would Aldo Leopold do?" The late Father of Modern Wildlife Management, whose writings continue to inspire new generations of conservationists worldwide, moves us to work daily to advance conservation and outdoor recreational opportunities.

We've accomplished a lot in one year, and with your help we can make 2010 an even better year for Illinois' natural and cultural resources.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Marc Miller', written in a cursive style.

Marc Miller, Director